

The Face of Time

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The Face of Time

BY

JAMES T. FARRELL



London

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To the memory of
ALEC SCHLOSSER

Although I shelter from the rain
Under a broken tree,
My chair was nearest to the fire
In every company
That talked of love or politics,
Ere Time transfigured me.

Though lads are making pikes again
For some conspiracy,
And crazy rascals rage their fill
At human tyranny,
My contemplations are of Time
That has transfigured me.

There's not a woman turns her face
Upon a broken tree,
And yet the beauties that I loved
Are in my memory;
I spit into the face of Time
That has transfigured me.

The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner
by W. B. YEATS

SECTION ONE

Chapter One

I

LOOK, Father, horses . . ."
"Ah, be still, you little divil."

The short, wiry, red-faced Irishman with gray hair and a clipped, gray mustache held his five-year-old grandson by the hand. He walked with an air of dignity and importance. He was in his early seventies and looked well-preserved and healthy.

He was walking along Forty-ninth Street with Danny boy clinging to his hand.

It was spring and the weather was fine, and it made him think of the old country. Why, today it was like it might be only yesterday when he was a lad in Westmeath. And now here he was in America, a tired old man. All these years he'd worked by the sweat of his brow, and hard work it was. But he missed work. This life of a gentleman, if you please, was no life for him, beholden to his son Al and having Mary chase him from pillar to post like a chicken with its head cut off. The life of a gentleman, so it was, and so Tim and Pat and Dennis and his friends on the streetcar would say.

—Meet my friend, Tom O'Flaherty, sure and he's living the life of Reilly, the life of a gentleman.

Dennis Delaney had said that, introducing him to a young bucko of a cousin just out from the old country, a fine strap-ping lad by the name of John Stanton. But lucky he was, too, for the strength wasn't in him to do the work he'd done in his day, and there was the jingle of money in his pocket so that he could always sneak into a saloon and have a can of

beer with his friends, and tell me a man, tell me one, who had more friends than himself, Old Tom O'Flaherty.

"Pader, Father, are we going to the duckpond?"

"Ah, be still."

He looked down at the little fellow, a twinkle in his old and watery eyes. Danny had a pretty, roundish face with a dimple in his chin. His curly, brown hair hung down over his shoulders.

Old Tom proudly thought on how he had as fine a grandson as a man could ask the Lord for. But why in the name of God had Mary dressed the little fellow up in Sunday clothes with white stockings and that white sailor's suit? There was no telling what that woman of his would be up to doing, no telling by man, beast, or bird. Ah, there were days indeed when he even felt sorry for the good Lord Himself, because when Mary went up there she'd give Hell even to Him.

"Father, Pader, Pader," Danny O'Neill excitedly called.

"Yes, and what is it now?" Old Tom asked gruffly.

"Look, look, more horses."

Danny pointed to two handsome, well-groomed brown horses pulling a big, shining black carriage. The coachman was wearing a top hat. Old Tom surveyed the horses with a practiced eye. Fine horses these were. They must be owned by rich swells.

He grew wistful, remembering himself years ago when he'd driven out of the barn for the first time with his own horse and wagon. Proud day that was for him, proud indeed. How many years ago? He didn't know.

"Aren't we going to the duckpond, Pader?" Danny asked, as they walked slowly on toward Grand Boulevard.

"Ah, be still and let me think."

"I want to feed the ducks."

Old Tom was thinking. Dared he slip into O'Callahan's saloon at Fifty-first and Calumet for a glass of beer? Would the little fellow give it away? They always asked the little fellow questions. Ah, he had a fondness for Danny boy, but

why in the name of God did the child have to be telling everything that went on?

Old Tom sighed.

"Pader, buy me Crackerjack to feed the ducks at the duck-pond."

"And what do you want to be feeding the ducks for?"

"Ducks get hungry. Feed the hungry ducks."

His weather-beaten face cracked into a smile. They came to Grand Boulevard and turned the corner. A ruddy, jolly-looking, very plump priest almost collided with them.

"Why, it's Tom O'Flaherty himself."

"Ah, good afternoon, Father, good afternoon. Fine day it is," Tom said, respectfully tipping his black derby.

"Yes, Tom, it is. And how's my young friend?"

Danny looked up at Father Hunt, wanting to be praised. He felt good.

"And tell me, lad, who is the greatest baseball player there is?" the priest asked, friendliness and amusement in his voice.

"Ty Cobb," Danny said, as if by rote.

"You are a good boy. You'll be a ball player yourself when you grow up," Father Hunt said, patting Danny's head.

Danny beamed in happiness. He waited for the priest to ask him more questions.

—Father Hunt is my friend, Danny said to himself.

"Tell me, Tom, how are you these days?"

Old Tom slowly and dourly shook his head from side to side. A melancholy expression came into his old gray eyes. He sighed.

"Father, me life isn't me own," he said with self-pity.

"You're not imbibing too much, Tom?" Father Hunt asked with a smile.

"No, Father, as God is my witness. A wee drop now and then, it's all I take for me disposition."

The old man and the priest exchanged understanding glances.

"Father, I tell you, me life isn't me own. Here I am, in the

latter end of me days, a hard-workin' man, and I can't call me soul me own with that woman of mine. Father, I tell you, it's 'Tom do this' and 'Tom do that,' 'Tom, put up the line for the nigger washwoman' and 'Tom, take care of the baby' and 'Tom, take the baby out' and 'Tom—' "

"Pader, Pader," Danny interrupted, tugging at his grandfather's coat sleeve.

"And what is it you're after wanting now?" Old Tom asked in mock gruffness.

"Pader, I'm not a baby—I'm a man."

Old Tom melted with pride.

"And you'll be a fine man, too, when you grow up," Father Hunt said. "Remember this when you grow up, Daniel, you remember that Father Hunt told you this."

"Yes, Father."

Happy with all this attention, Danny stood carefully eyeing them both.

"Tom, just take it easy, and whenever you have the wish, just ring the bell at the parish house and we'll have a chat," Father Hunt said, giving old Tom a wink.

"And who knows, we'll have a . . ."

Another wink.

"Father, if you could tell Mary a word or two for me," old Tom said.

"Indeed I will. Don't you worry, I will, the very next time I see her. I'll watch for her this Sunday at mass," Father Hunt said.

"Thank you, Father. You're a good man," Tom said respectfully.

Father Hunt dug into his trouser pockets. Danny was all eyes. The priest pulled out some change and selected a shiny silver coin.

"Daniel, here's a brand new nickel just for you."

The priest handed the coin to Danny, who grabbed it eagerly.

"And what do you say?" Old Tom demanded.

"Thank you."

"God bless you, Tom. And God bless you, Daniel," Father Hunt said.

"Thank you, Father," Tom said, respectfully tipping his hat.

Father Hunt shook hands with Old Tom and Danny and walked on.

Proceeding north, past the church, Tom tipped his hat again.

"Pader, Pader."

"Now what do you want?"

"Here."

Danny was pressing the nickel on his grandfather.

"It's yours, son."

"Buy Crackerjacks for the ducks, Pader."

Tom took the nickel and gazed tenderly at his grandson's curly head.

II

A nursemaid, he told himself, a nursemaid he was. He was sitting on a bench on the right side of the duckpond. On the benches around him the women, old and young, were cackling away, and, sure, wasn't it the truth that he would rather be hearing the quack-quacking of the ducks?

The green was coming out on the bushes and the trees bordering the small duckpond and on the little island in the center. Little children were running about, shouting and talking, playing in the sand pile on the other side of the pond from where old Tom sat, running in and out of it, falling and getting up, and the air was full of their voices and their crying and laughing. The white ducks swam about, now and then quacking, and Danny stood at the edge of the pond with a box of Crackerjack in his left hand.

"Quack-quack," he was calling.

He took some Crackerjack from the box, spilling some on the sandy gravel, and awkwardly flinging the pieces on the stag-

nant water. A sparrow shot under his feet, grabbed up a piece of Crackerjack, and shot nervously away. A duck swam near the little island in the center of the pond.

"Here, quack-quack."

Danny looked disappointed. Then his eyes lit up with a bright idea. He turned and ran to his grandfather, exclaiming excitedly, "Pader, Pader."

"And what is it now?"

"Pader, I want a bell."

"Where in the name of God would I be finding a bell in the park?"

"I want Mother's bell."

"What will you want to be doing with a bell, I ask you?"

"Mother rings the bell and I come to dinner. I ring the bell and the ducks come to dinner."

"Well, now, what do you think of that?"

Danny gazed intently at his grandfather.

A stout woman with a babyish, round face sat on the bench with Tom. She wore a plain blue suit, white lacy shirtwaist, and a broad black hat with black velvet trimming.

"My, my, what a smart boy," she said.

"Smart the laddie is."

"Sonny boy, come here and tell me your name."

Danny looked at her suspiciously.

"Tell the lady your name," Old Tom said.

"Daniel O'Neill."

"That's a nice name, and you're a nice boy."

"Do you have an alarm clock?" Danny asked the fat woman.

She flung her head back in laughter. Danny didn't know why she laughed. He didn't like it.

"You must like the ducks," the fat lady said.

"The ducks like Crackerjack."

"And don't you?"

"I like Crackerjack."

"My, my, you're a good boy to share your Crackerjack with the ducks," the fat lady said.

Danny looked at her as though he didn't know what she was talking about. Then he turned, ran to the edge of the duckpond, and called out:

"Here, quack-quack ducks!"

He began to fling more Crackerjack into the water, and this time the ducks swam toward him.

III

"My, you must be proud of your lovely little grandson," the fat lady said to Tom.

"He's me daughter's second oldest."

He couldn't help liking the little fellow. The boy was his own flesh and blood. And sometimes didn't he enjoy taking the boy out and being with him? He'd do it more if Mary wasn't always ordering him to do it.

"Yes, a grandchild must be a joy. And your grandson, what was his name?"

"Daniel. He's named after Daniel O'Connell."

This meant nothing to the nosey lump of flesh beside him, and it wasn't the God's truth because it wasn't himself that did the naming. But he liked to think that his favorite grandson bore the name of Daniel O'Connell. Ah, there had been a great man, a fine man. The Emancipator, they had called him. And as a boy, hadn't he heard tell of him from his father and the other men? And they spoke of his coming home to Ireland, dead, at the time of the Great Famine, and the people going out to America, hungry and poor, and seeing the ship bearing Daniel O'Connell's body coming into the harbor. They had brought Daniel O'Connell home to be buried in Ireland. Sure, his own old bones would never rest in the old sod.

That nosey bag of flesh beside him was talking, and what in the name of God was she saying?

"Do you always take your grandson out?"

"Now and again, Mam. I'm retired, and now and again I take him out."

Danny was running with some boys. Well, let him run. No ill could befall him here.

But wasn't it just his misfortune to be sitting beside this nosey bag of flesh instead of a man to talk with?

Old Tom took out of his pocket his corncob pipe and his half-crushed package of Tip Top Tobacco and carefully filled the pipe. He lit it and puffed, letting his twinkling eyes rove about. The boy was in the sand pile. Mary had said that he was to be sure and not let the baby get dirty in his clean white clothes.

—Ah, the devil with Mary. The devil take her. Let the laddie play in the sand.

He puffed on his pipe.

And what was the nosey one beside him saying now? She had none of her own. Well, that he could well understand, for what kind of a man would have wanted to be marrying her?

Danny was rushing to him, screaming. Now what had happened to the little fellow?

"Pader! Pader!" Danny wailed, running up to his grandfather with his hands to his face.

People looked at him. Old Tom became alarmed by Danny's screams.

"What is it after happening to you, me boy?"

Danny still cried.

"Are you hurt, Daniel? Here, let me see you and wipe your face," the fat woman said.

"It hurts my eyes. He threw sand in my eyes."

"Here," Old Tom said, drawing out a handkerchief and wiping the sand off Danny's face.

Danny stopped crying.

"It hurts. My eyes. He threw sand in my eyes."

"Come here, Daniel," the fat lady said.

He went to her timidly. She wiped his face and eyes.

"Is it better now, Daniel?"

"Yes, Mam."

"Don't let him throw any more sand in your eyes. Who was it, the boy?"

"A boy. I don't know him. He threw sand. It went in my eye."

"Now go back and play and be careful."

Danny ran off. Old Tom sighed. For a minute he had worried for fear it was something serious.

"Such a darling boy. I wish I had a boy like that," the fat woman said.

"Sure, children are all alike. I raised me own, and it's the same with me grandchildren. One minute they're happy, and the next minute they're hurt and come to you crying."

Old Tom wondered how soon he might risk leaving here and getting himself a glass of beer. He had a thirst for a glass of beer. He puffed on his pipe again and looked about at the playing children, and at the ducks swimming in the pond. Ah, this was no place and no life for the likes of himself.

IV

Old Tom had had a good time with his grandson, but he would never let on to Mary that he had liked it. What was there for a man to do in his retirement? A can of beer, a talk with his friends, good sleep and sitting in the sunshine, and being with his grandson. There were other grandchildren—Bill who was nine and Little Margaret, a darling little girl she was—but this one was the apple of his eye. But once admit something to that woman of his, and there was no end of it.

Danny took his grandfather's hand. His white suit was dirty and streaked with sand. His white stockings were dirty, almost gray in spots. The right one was ripped at the knee, and there were patches of dried blood on the skin and the frayed stocking. His black shoes were dusty. And his round little face was dirty, too. But his blue eyes were bright and shiny, and he kept smiling to himself.

Neither of them spoke as they walked along Calumet Avenue. The old man chewed a stick of gum, hoping that it and the last pipeful would take away the smell of beer, on his breath. Now, if the little fellow only didn't say anything . . .

He could just imagine the turmoil if the little fellow should say they'd been in O'Callahan's saloon. And a high-class saloon it was. God Almighty, didn't Mary herself like a swig of a can of beer? That she did. And no harm had come to the little fellow, and the bartender gave him a full bottle of pop for good behavior, too.

He began to sing, half aloud:

Ob, Paddy dear, and did you hear . .

It was twilight. The sun had gone down. The little old man in the black derby hat sang half-aloud to himself and held the hand of his dirty-faced grandson as they solemnly walked home.

Chapter Two

I

WHEN Old Tom and Danny entered the O'Flaherty apartment in the 4700 block on Indiana Avenue, Mary O'Flaherty grabbed Danny, kissed him, and excitedly exclaimed:

"Here's me grandson!"

Mary O'Flaherty was of about the same height as Tom. Her hair had not even a trace of gray in it. Her sharp features softened when she looked with tenderness and love on her grandson.

"Sure, you look like you've been in the fields or the prairie, with all of the grime you have on you."

"Sure, and you can't keep a laddie his age out of the dirt and the sand pile," Old Tom said defensively.

"Mother—Pader took me to the duckpond. I fed the ducks Crackerjack. Father Hunt gave me a nickel. Father Hunt is my friend."

"He's a saint of God. He doesn't drink like that other one, Father Costello, may he have the grace of the Lord on his soul."

"Is Father Costello bad, Mother?"

"No priest is bad, son. Tell me, did you have a good time? How did Pa treat you, and did he take good care of you?"

Old Tom frowned.

"Ah, Mary, he's a grand little fellow, Mary, a grand little fellow, and no trouble at all."

"Indeed he is," Mary O'Flaherty said with positiveness.

"Mother? Mother?"

"Yes, son."

"I want Pader to take me to the duckpond tomorrow, every day."

Tom O'Flaherty made a long face.

"What happened to me grandson?" Mary asked, noticing that Danny had cut his knee.

"Oh, he was running and he fell and got himself a little cut."

"Yes, I fell. I was running and there was a big boy. He pushed me. And a big boy threw sand in my eyes."

"You should have put a rock in his eyes," Mary O'Flaherty said.

She turned to Tom.

He quailed. Would she be saying something? He loved his Mary, but he didn't love her tongue.

"The next time you take me grandson out, you stop the big boys from picking on me grandson." She turned to Danny: "Are you all right, son?"

"Oh, it was nothing, Mary, it was nothing," Old Tom said, trying to be persuasive.

"Mother, I'm all right. I ain't hurt."

She made a dramatic gesture with her hands, stretching out her thin, talonlike fingers with their long nails.

"Let me put these hands of mine on anyone who touches you! Just let me!"

Danny wished Mother would cut her fingernails.

"Let me wash you and clean you for supper, Daniel."

"Mother, where's Aunt Louise?"

"She'll be home from work any minute now. Come; son."

"I want her to come home. I want Aunt Louise here," Danny said insistently. Mary O'Flaherty put her arm around his shoulder and led him to the bathroom.

Old Tom relaxed. She hadn't asked about the saloon. He went to the parlor to sit down and wait for supper and for Louise to come home. Margaret was working tonight. Ah, but that was something to be proud of, his two daughters.

He sat quietly rocking away in the darkening parlor, hearing the Indiana Avenue streetcars as they passed.

II

Mary O'Flaherty, Tom, Danny, and Louise sat at the round table in the dining room eating supper. Danny was eating slowly. He was watching Aunt Louise, but he didn't want them to know how much he was watching her.

"He must be tired," Aunt Louise said.

Danny just liked the sound of her voice. It was so soft and made him feel good. Sometimes he talked to her just so he could hear her voice. She was his beautiful Aunt Louise.

Louise sat opposite Danny. She was nineteen, tall, thin, and beautiful. She had sad, blue eyes; her face was finely modeled, and her skin was very clear. Her hair was thick and a rich auburn. She wore it simply. She had on a white shirtwaist that enhanced her attractiveness.

"Eat your supper, son—you must have nothing in your little stomach," Mary O'Flaherty coaxed.

Danny picked up his fork and took a piece of meat. Mother had cut his pork chops. He chewed fast. He wanted to get the piece of meat swallowed. When you ate and swallowed, the food made you strong, and it made you go to the bathroom and do number two. Number two was bad. It was bad to do it in your pants. Babies did two in diapers, and Mama washed the diapers. Mama was his mother. Mother was his grandmother. He loved Mother best. He loved his beautiful Aunt Louise. Everybody said he looked like her. Danny swallowed the meat.

"Sometimes the little fellow is as quiet as a mouse," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Danny took another piece of meat.

"I wonder where me son Al is tonight," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Al is in Detroit, Mother," Aunt Louise said.

"Me son is the finest boy a mother ever had," Mary O'Flaherty said as if she were throwing out a challenge.

"That he is, Mary. And wasn't I tellin' Tommy McGann on the streetcars just that. I was saying to him what a fine job me son Al has, traveling here and there and staying at the finest hotels, and Tommy was green with envy, Mary, green-eyed when I was tellin' him about Al's suits and his ties and his shoes—and just like I was tellin' him nothing at all, I says to him, Mary, I says, 'Yes, a pair of oxfords, ten dollars, that's the kind of shoes me son Al buys.'"

"Uncle Al sells shoes," Danny said.

All eyes turned on him.

"Ah, you're the smart little boy," Mary said. "You're me grandson. You're going to grow up to be as fine a man as me son Al, indeed you are."

"Uncle Al doesn't take his lunch to work."

"He's too swell for that, son."

Louise burst into gay laughter. Tom made a face and his eyes danced.

"I swear to God that the day he ran away, 'he put me heart in me mouth," Mary said. "Me heart was jumpin' right up in me throat."

Danny knew what his grandmother was talking about. He beamed with the attention of everyone upon him.

"Tell me about it, Mother," he said.

"But Danny dear, you know," Aunt Louise said,

"Tell me," he said, turning toward her, his tone of voice almost tyrannical.

"Sure, there I was in the kitchen, workin' away, and Tom was at work, and I asked the nigger washwoman what happened to me grandson."

Again Danny beamed.

"He wasn't any place to be found. I called. I went to the front and to the back, but nary a place was he. I sent the nigger washwoman out, but nary a sight could she find of

him. And so I went out meself, and nary a sight or light of him could I find."

Danny laughed.

"Were you afraid, Mother?"

"And I said to meself, 'This is not like me grandson, Daniel.' My God, I thought it was the kidnapers."

"Were you afraid, Mother?"

"That I was."

Danny laughed.

"And, Pader—were you afraid?"

"Oh, sure, I was at work."

"Would you be afraid if you knew I was gone away and I was lost?"

"I'd have gone after you with me razor strop," Old Tom said affectionately.

"Aunt Louise, were you afraid?"

"I wasn't here either, Danny, and I didn't know about it until after you'd been found by the police."

"You would have been afraid if you knew, wouldn't you, Aunt Louise?" he asked persistently.

"Afraid? I'd have been terrified."

"What's that?"

"That's being very much afraid, as if you knew the bogey-man was really going to get you or . . ."

Her words broke off, and wistfulness clouded her handsome face. And Danny, who had been laughing, suddenly changed. He became grave.

"Eat your meal, son, before it gets cold. A growing boy needs hot food in his stomach."

Danny began to eat.

"God in Heaven," Mary went on, "when I was told what happened, you could have knocked me down with a breath of wind."

Danny beamed at his grandmother.

"What was it you said to the policeman when he came to the door with Danny, Mother?" Louise asked.

"I can't remember. I must have said, 'There's me little grandson.'"

"Whatever put in your head to do that, Danny?" Louise asked.

"I wanted to go to work and take my lunch in the newspaper like Pader."

They laughed.

"Think of it, the little fellow wrapping his blocks in the newspaper and just lighting off. Son, don't you do that again."

"No, Mother, I won't."

"Where did you go?" Aunt Louise asked.

"To work," Danny said.

Tom watched him, thinking that the boy had wanted to do the kind of work he did. It made him feel good. The little fellow didn't go out and say he wanted to sell shoes like Al. He wanted to carry his lunch and drive a team of horses. Ah, but the little fellow didn't know it was hard work, and how could he know the days when the cold nipped you and bit you and made your fingers numb, and froze your feet until they pained you, and you wanted to pray to the Almighty God for your day's work to be over? And his day's work was over, over for life. Well, God forbid that the curly-headed little fellow should ever have to work as hard as his green-horn grandfather.

Tom looked at the boy. The lad was smiling. A happy little lad. He was an American. So were his own children—Ned and Al and Louise and Margaret and Elizabeth—so were they Americans, as much as this grandson of his.

"What did you do, son?"

"I got lost, Mother."

Tom turned to gaze across the table at Mary. He tried to remember her as a girl in the old country, frail and small, with her lovely hair and her pretty girl's face. She could run, swift, swift as a deer and the wind, he used to say. And now she was a grandmother out here in America. The little boy

saying he got lost. Wasn't he himself lost, lost out here in America? Ah, if he could only go back. He turned tender eyes on Louise, wondering if she, his baby, could understand him and his wanting to go back to spend his latter days and to die in the old country.

III

Mary rocked gently and puffed on her corncob pipe. Old Tom puffed on his, too, and, holding the warm bowl in his hand, watched the slowly ascending smoke.

"Mary, I was just tellin' myself—it's hard work we did for our children, hard work."

"Indeed it was, Tom. And then me son Ned and me daughter Lizz whisk themselves off and get married. And to what? Ned to that sick woman, and she half-alive, in Madison, Wisconsin, and Lizz to that pauper."

"Jim O'Neill's a good man, Mary, a good, hard-working man."

"Ah, he never worked harder than you, Tom."

"Sure, the work is harder here than it was in the old country, Mary."

Both of them grew nostalgic.

From the dining room they heard the sound of a typewriter. Mary O'Flaherty sat up, her thin, small body taut.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" she exclaimed dramatically. "The devil is in the house."

Tom looked at her, pained and uneasy. After all these years with Mary he could never be knowing for sure what she would be saying next.

"Ah, Mary, sit here and have a puff of your pipe with me and let the devil go to the devil. Sure and nothing's the matter."

The sound of the typewriter continued.

"It's that machine. Satan is in that machine," she said, angrily, pointing a finger at him.

"Ah, Mary, that machine is American, and the Americans like them, just like they like the automobiles. Horseless carriages and typewriters, who would have ever thought of them but the Americans? Sure, me mother's eyes would have come out of her head if she could have lived to see the things that be these days. It's American, and sure our Louise she'll get a fine job in an office once she learns the p's and q's of that machine."

"A girl in her health—I tell you, Tom, that girl is a frail one. She's not the likes of me when I was her age."

"You were the girl, Mary. The girl of me heart."

Mary leaned forward and said in a low whisper:

"Tom, that machine will be the death of her yet."

"Don't say that, Mary, don't."

The old lady dramatically blessed herself. Then he stood and, raising her voice, exclaimed, "I swear by these old bones of mine, no good will come of that machine out of Hell itself."

IV

Old Tom's pipe had gone out again. He sat, holding it between his lips, looking from the parlor down the small dark hallway to the dining room, where Louise sat at the typewriter. He could see her hands. Ah, she had beautiful hands. She was a beautiful girl. And to think that such a beautiful girl was his own daughter, his own flesh and blood.

An uneasy feeling came upon him as if he had done something, committed a sin. He told himself that he hadn't done a thing, nary a thing had he done.

Louise's hands at the typewriter.

"That electric light costs money."

Mary had raised her voice and, good God Himself in Heaven, she was at it again, flying off the handle, as his son Ned said. He missed Ned. When would Ned be coming to Chicago?

"Mother, please let me practice."

"If me son Al was home."



"Mother, Al wants me to learn to typewrite," Louise said in a pleading voice.

Old Tom wished Mary would stop and let the poor girl be. But if he said anything she'd be at him, too.

He walked quietly to his bedroom next to the parlor. He shut the door and switched on the light. What a wonder of the world it was to press the little button and there was the electricity, and, think of it, of how there was nothing of this in the old country when he was a young buck of a lad. Ah, the wonders of the world, the wonders of the world here in America.

He sat on the bed. He gazed with dull, vacant eyes at the white, blue, and pink flower-patterned wallpaper. Sad thoughts went hazily through his mind and he wasn't even sure of what they were.

—Ah! he exclaimed to himself.

He moved his old head from side to side, not knowing why he did so.

—The wonders of the world, he silently said.

He blinked his eyes and became very drowsy. Somewhere in his stomach he felt a pain. His sleepy head began to nod, as though against his will.

—Ah, I'll be dead soon.

He got up, yawning, and began to undress.

—The wonders of the world!

He heard Mary still nagging Louise in the dining room. He went on undressing. He stood for a moment, naked. The hair on his chest was gray. His stomach muscles were slack. His old limbs were tired now. He was ashamed of his nakedness, even alone with himself in his little bedroom with the door closed. Quickly he got his long flannel nightgown from the closet and drew it on.

He wanted to get right into bed, but he had to go to the bathroom. He stood, barefooted, not wanting to go out to the bathroom in his nightgown, not wanting Louise to see or hear.

him going and not wanting Mary to notice him because she was on the warpath.

He wished he didn't have to go. His head dropped, and his chin almost touched his chest. He fingered his gray mustache and then licked it with his tongue. He opened the door and peered out in the dim hallway.

"Me son Al's word is law in this house," Mary was saying.

On tiptoe he came out of the bedroom and went quietly along the small hallway to the bathroom just by the dining room.

"Is that you, Tom?" Mary called.

"It is, Mary," he said, his hand on the bathroom door.

"Get your rest, Tom. You worked hard all your life, and you earned it. You're a good man."

"I will, Mary," he answered, suddenly grateful.

He went into the bathroom and quietly closed the door.

Chapter Three

I

I'M ON a streetcar."

"What did you say, Little Brother?" asked his Aunt Margaret.

She was handsome and dark-haired and in her early twenties. She was wearing her glasses. Sometimes she wore them; sometimes she didn't. She sat at the kitchen table, drinking coffee. Her bathrobe was open. Danny looked at her breasts but didn't want her to know he was doing it. Milk didn't come out of her breasts or Aunt Louise's, the way it did from Mama. He knew this because of that Sunday when he was mad and crying so and Aunt Louise and Aunt Margaret had him suck at their breasts and there was no milk and it made him mad. He'd been a little fellow then, not five years old like he was now.

"Don't look at me, Little Brother," Aunt Margaret said.

"I'm not. I'm a streetcar," he answered evasively.

"What are you, the . . . the da-ductor?"

"He's not that. He's the *conductor*."

"You used to say the da-ductor. You used to tell your Aunt Peg, Little Brother, that when you grew up you wanted to be the da-ductor on a streetcar."

"*Conductor*," Danny told her with a child's pride and scorn in being right at the expense of a grownup.

"Come here, Little Brother, and let me kiss you. Oh, you have such pretty hair—a girl would love to have your curls," she said, smiling at him. "Ah, Little Brother, when you grow up you're going to be something very important. You're very smart."

Danny wished he could grow up in a hurry.

"Where is he?" Mary O'Flaherty said, coming into the kitchen.

"Here he is, Mother," Margaret answered.

"Ah, didn't I lay out his clothes fer him this morning?"

"And you dressed yourself?" Aunt Margaret asked him.

"Where is Pa?"

"Pader went out."

"He did, did he? And saying nary a word to me."

"Oh, Mother, Father is just out getting in the sun some place."

"And he didn't tell me where he was?"

"Mother, why don't you stop picking on Father and nagging him?"

Mrs. O'Flaherty stared at her daughter and placed her hands on her hips.

"Bless my tired old soul—stop picking on your father?" she exclaimed. "Ah, me mother should be here to hear that."

"You're always fighting with him or you're fighting with me and Louise."

"Saint Joseph in Heaven! Fighting? It's no' enough fighting I do, nary enough."

Danny marched into the dining room, stamping his feet and calling out.

"Ding-dong! Ding-dong!"

"Little Brother, don't do that. Mrs. Morton upstairs complains of the noise you make."

"Mrs. Morton! That whore!" Mrs. O'Flaherty burst out.

As his grandmother and Aunt Margaret began to shout at one another, he marched back into the parlor, calling:

"Ding-dong! Get out of my way, ding-dong, ding-dong!"

He wondered what a whore was.

II

Old Tom sat in the sun on the high steps of the yellow-brick, two-story building, smoking his corncob pipe and

thinking. He wouldn't breathe a word of it, but he wished he was doing this in the old country. Sure and hadn't he thought there was nothing for him in the old country with his older brother, Pat, getting the small farm, and he was wanting to come out here to America? Ah, was it worth it? Was he so much better off than if he'd never come here?

But there was Mr. Gehagen going to his office and at this time of the morning, like a gentleman. Well, his own sons went to their work at the time of day a gentleman did. Mr. Gehagen nodded a stiff good morning to Tom, and Tom returned the nod. He didn't care for that Mr. Gehagen. Wouldn't you think he owned the sidewalk from the way he walked, with the air of him and the cut of him and the get-up of him? A gentleman he tried to be because he worked in an office.

Tom got up and moved over to the railing at the side of the porch, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and put it in his pocket. He sat down again.

If he went inside, Mary would find something for him to do or she might be finding some fault with him. And there was that fat Mrs. Mulligan across the street. Just look at the waddle on her. Did a man ever see the like of it? She must be going to the store to do her marketing on Forty-seventh Street. She must be walking on the other side of the street so as not to pass this house. She and Mary had had bad words over the little fellow, and Mary was always saying that some day she would tear the eyes right out of the head of that Mulligan one. A biddy she was, and Billie Mulligan, her man, led a dog's life with that biddy always nagging him. Look at the big fat behind on her, would you?

A northbound streetcar passed in front of Mrs. Mulligan.

"Good morning, Tom."

It was Officer O'Reilly.

"Good morning yourself, John."

"Fine morning."

"That it is."

Officer O'Reilly was big, and his belly stuck out under his uniform and belt. He twirled his club and rubbed his drooping black mustache. He gazed up at the blue sky over the two- and three-story buildings.

"How's the young man, Tom?"

"Fine, fine, John. He's inside now, playing at something or other."

"They liked him at the Station. Lieutenant Canovan put him up there on the desk and put a hat on him and let him play with keys, and the two of them had a time of it, I hear tell. He isn't running off to work again, is he?"

"No, John, he isn't."

"The little fellow can't wait to be working, can he? He takes after his grandfather."

"Time enough and he'll have his fill of work, John."

"He'll be a lawyer or a doctor, Tom. Me sister Kate's boy, Joseph, now, he's studying to be a dentist. Well, I don't want him pulling any of me own teeth."

"Thank God, I still have the teeth the good Lord gave me," Old Tom said, thinking how Mary had false teeth.

"Fine, Tom, and you're looking well these days. Sure, retirement is good for you. It's ten years yet before I'll be retiring on me pension."

"What's the news in the neighborhood, John?"

"Nothin', nothin' at all. Well, Tom, take care of yourself."

The officer twirled his club and walked on toward Forty-seventh Street with an air of importance.

Old Tom thought of his teeth with pride and bit down on his lowers. Yes, they were hard and solid, and they could bite into a pork chop or a roast beef, and him seventy-one years old. Ah, that day Mary had lost her teeth, that had been a bad day. Peg had stayed home from work to take her, and when he had come home from his own work there was Mary in bed with nary a word to say, she had suffered so. It had touched his heart. But she was a brave woman, Mary was,

taking the gas the dentist gave her, and when he saw her there in her bed she was a brave one still.

He bit down on his lower teeth again. He sat on the steps, feeling the warm and caressing sun on his gray head.

"Pa, come on in and go to the store for me," Mary O'Flaherty called loudly from the front window.

—That woman of mine, Old Tom thought, as he meekly obeyed her command.

III

"Pa, are you back?" Mary O'Flaherty called from the rear of the apartment. "Did you come back with me American Family Soap?"

"Here's everything you wanted your errand boy to get," he answered, walking out to the kitchen with the big bag. He set it down on the kitchen table.

"There," he said in justification and triumph, holding before him the shopping list Louise had written out.

"Is that piece of paper me American Family Soap?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"If it was written on the paper, Mr. Ferguson would have put it in the bag."

"That North of Irelander," Mary O'Flaherty said with contempt. "That Tipperary man!"

"He's a gentleman."

"Gentleman he is . . . Gentleman . . . in a pig's backside."

"Read it! Read it and see where it says one bar of American Family Soap," Old Tom challenged.

"Go back to that Tipperary man's store and tell him to give you a bar of American Family Soap," she told him.

"That I'll do . . . But show me where it says a bar of American Family Soap on this order," he said, waving the paper in front of her.

"Ah, and I forgot to tell me daughter Louise to write it

down. Run down and get me a bar of American Family Soap, Tom, like the good man that you are."

Old Tom walked out of the kitchen. His back looked old.

IV

"I never saw a man who sleeps as much as Pa. He's up in the morning, then he's back in bed. He's back in bed in the afternoon. I never saw the likes of it."

"Mother, Father worked so hard all his life, and he's not a well man," Margaret said.

"Sometimes I do worry about him. Peg, what do you think?"

"He's not well. I can tell. He doesn't look well."

"What ails him, poor man?"

Peg shook her head—she didn't know.

"Poor man," Mary O'Flaherty sighed.

Peg wanted to cry. She loved her father, she loved him dearly, and she didn't want to lose him. Oh, her poor father.

Mary O'Flaherty jumped up energetically as Danny came in the front door bawling loudly:

"Mother! Mother!"

"What is it, son? What is it?" Mary O'Flaherty called, as she scurried to the front of the apartment.

Margaret rose and followed her. Danny's face was streaked with dirt and tears.

"Mother!"

"Are you hurt, son? Let me feel your little bones."

"He hit me," Danny sobbed out, shaking, his voice quivering.

"Are you all right, Little Brother?"

"Who hit you?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, bent down to her grandson. She stood up and turned to her daughter.

"Peg, get me a stick. Get me a stick quick and I'll bash them that hit me grandson. I'll bash them within an inch of their life."

"Who hit you, Little Brother?"

"Tommy Jones." Danny shook with tears. "He hit me because I have curls. He hurt me."

"Here, let me see, and I'll wash your face," Aunt Margaret said.

"Son," Mary O'Flaherty cut in in a dramatic tone of voice. "Son."

"Yes, Mother?"

"Son, you go out and don't come back till you bring me a pound of his flesh." She raised her talonlike old hands and clenched them. "You go and bring me back a pound of his flesh, a pound of his flesh."

"Yes, Mother."

Danny stopped crying, set his chin with determination, and tore out through the front door.

"Oh, I'll teach him not to let them pick on him," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"It's only a children's spat. They'll be friends in five minutes, Mother."

"I must get me a good stout stick and put it to any tinker's son that touches me precious little grandson," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Mary O'Flaherty was in the kitchen washing dishes. Margaret went to her bedroom and began dressing to go to her job at the hotel. Tom O'Flaherty slept in his small bedroom. Behind closed doors, his snoring was scarcely audible.

Suddenly Danny could be heard crying in the front of the apartment.

"Mother of God!" Mrs. O'Flaherty exclaimed.

She rushed to the front, not bothering to dry her soapy hands.

"Mother! Mother!"

"What did they do to you now, son?"

"Mother!"

"Little Brother, are you hurt?" Aunt Margaret called anxiously.

"I . . . I . . . Mother . . ."

"Tell me, what is it? What's the matter, son? Are you hurt?"

"I . . . I . . ." Danny's voice throbbed. "I couldn't . . . I couldn't."

"You couldn't what, Little Brother?" Aunt Margaret asked sympathetically, entering the parlor in her stiff pink corsets with her black silk stockings tightly held up by garters.

"I couldn't get . . . I couldn't get a pound of his flesh."

Mary O'Flaherty raised her head and smiled.

"I scratched him and kicked him. I beat Tommy up, Mother, I did."

"Good for you, Daniel," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"But I couldn't get it. It wouldn't come off."

Mary O'Flaherty continued to smile. Danny relaxed.

"I tried to get it," Danny said very seriously.

"Where's the little beggar?"

"He ran home crying to his mother."

"Little Brother, you mustn't fight that way," Margaret said.

"Pick on them that picks on you, son," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"What in the name of God's going on now? All I hear is him crying and screaming, waking me up out of me sound sleep," Tom growled, coming into the parlor.

"What need have you to be sleeping at this time of day?"

"There's no harm in a man taking a wee nap, is there, Mary?"

He noticed Margaret, but seeing her half-dressed, Tom dropped his eyes.

"Don't look at me, Father."

"Go put your clothes on, you hussy," Mary O'Flaherty said to Margaret.

"Why, Mother, what did you say?" Margaret asked, hurt.

"What I say, I say."

She bent down and patted Danny's curly head. "Son, your old grandmother is proud of you, proud indeed."

She turned to her husband. "Pa, I want you to go to the store and get a quarter of a pound of butter for me grandson's lunch."

Tom O'Flaherty stared at her with protest in his eyes.

VI

"What do you think it says, Tom?" Mary asked, pointing at the yellow envelope of the telegram which lay on the dining-room table.

"You say it's to you, Mary?"

"That's what the telegraph boy said. 'For Mrs. O'Flaherty.'"

"Maybe it's from your sister?"

"What in the name of God would she be sending me a telegram for?"

"Or do you think it might be from Ned?"

"Do you think it's her? Do you think she's dead?"

"She's not a well woman, Mary."

Mary O'Flaherty blessed herself.

"Oh, she was a good woman, only I say, she was far too old for me son Ned. What in the name of God he ever saw in her—now I tell you, Tom, I say, nobody can riddle me that riddle. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I hope she hasn't gone and died on him. Ah, me son Al would never run off and marry that way."

"You say it's for you, and not for me, Mary?" Tom asked, again casting inquisitive eyes on the telegram.

She jabbed her left index finger against her chest at a point between her breasts and said:

"Yes, me. There's me name on it."

"But Mary, you can't read the name."

"I can read me own name, and I can spell it, too. Pity 'tis you can't read."

"I can't read, you say? Indeed I can."

"What scholar learned you to read?"

"I learned meself."

"Open it and read me me telegram."

"Well, I can read. I can read a newspaper, Mary, but I can't read a telegram. That I never learned."

"What time will me daughter Louise be home from the office to read me me telegram?"

"Oh, she'll be coming home when it's time for her to come home. . . . Mary?"

"What is it, Tom?"

"Maybe Mrs. Morton would read us the telegram."

Mary rose and fixed him with steady eyes.

"Me son Al says that chippy must never darken the door of this house! That daughter of a tinker! I'd see me soul burn in Hell first."

"Well, I was only makin' a suggestion, Mary."

Their eyes again strayed to the telegram.

"Mary, do you think it might be from the old country?"

"Where in the name of God would they be getting the money to be affording a telegram? Sure, they're too poor."

"I was only after asking a question, Mary?"

"I hope nothing has happened to me son Al."

"Ah, and what could be happening to Al?"

"Riding trains and carrying suitcases, I pray to God for that poor boy morning, noon, and night. He puts the crust of bread on the table for his poor old mother."

"Ah, Mary, you're not old."

"Tom."

"Yes, Mary."

"Here, I'll get you the can and you whist down to Forty-seventh with it."

His eyes brightened.

"I was just after thinking, Mary, we might be having a quiet little sip of beer, you and I, the way we used to."

She rose and went to the kitchen for the can. Tom stared in frustration at the telegram on the table.

VII

"You never think of going back, Mary?"

"What in the name of God have I got to be going back to, with me mother dead and gone these many years?"

"Yes, I feel the same meself, Mary."

They sat on opposite sides of the small kitchen table. There was an old oilcloth cover on it, and their can of beer was set between them. The kitchen was always somewhat dark, and now, as the day waned, they had the electric light on.

"And would I have steam heat and electric light and gas and a telephone and a bathroom in the old country—ah, and over there, what are you if you aren't one of the gentry or a lady? What are you, Tom? A pauper."

"You speak the truth, Mary."

• "Indeed I do. I always speak the truth, just like me mother before me."

"Indeed. Indeed, Mary."

Tom reached forward, pulled the can of beer toward him, and took a swig. He sighed contentedly and rubbed the back of his hand across his lips, chin, and mustache.

"Pass me the can, Tom."

He shoved the can toward her. She grabbed it in both hands, took a long drink, and then, after setting it down on the table, she, too, wiped her lips and chin with the back of her hand.

For awhile neither of them said anything.

"Yes," Tom exclaimed, talking to himself.

After about thirty seconds of silence, she asked:

"What's that you said, Tom?"

"I was telling meself, Mary, it's many a good cosy time together that you and I have had."

"Tom, it's a hard life we have had, and we're better off dead."

"Our time will come soon enough, soon enough," he said, his voice thick with beer and melancholy.

"What have I got but me grandson and me son Al?" she asked.

Tom looked at her. He wanted to ask her if she didn't have him, too, but he didn't. Living all these years with Mary, he had learned that many a thing was better not said to her, and many a question was better not asked.

He stared at her, his eyes slightly watery. A fine, strong woman she was, his Mary, but little had he thought when he'd first known her, a shy wisp of a girl in the old country, what a devil of a tongue she had.

VIII

"Come here, son."

Danny went timidly to his grandmother. He didn't like the smell of beer in the kitchen. Mother and Father were drinking beer out of the can. Uncle Al said you shouldn't drink beer out of a can. Uncle Al said to drink beer out of a glass.

His grandmother leaned forward, put her arms around him, and kissed him. He didn't like the smell of her breath.

"Ah, you're me precious grandson."

Old Tom gazed at Danny with bleary eyes.

"Son, when you grow up you'll be the cock of the walk," Mary said, releasing Danny.

"It's getting dark out. I came in, Mother."

She reached over and took up the can. She drank the last of the beer.

"Tom, you whist down to Forty-seventh Street and get another can of beer. And I'll have to be starting to cook supper. Louise will be coming home."

Tom jumped up. Mary fumbled in her apron pocket, fished out a dime, and handed it to him.

IX

"Where's everybody?" Louise asked, letting herself in the darkened hallway.

"Pader just came back."

"Where was he?"

"Mother gave Pader a dime, and Pader rushed the can," Danny proudly told her.

Louise stiffened up with fright.

"Where is he now?"

"Drinking beer with Mother in the kitchen."

She turned to go to the rear of the apartment.

"Aunt Louise!" Danny called peremptorily.

"Just a minute, Daniel."

"Aunt Louise!" he screamed, stamping his foot.

"What's the matter?" she asked in irritation.

"I'm mad at you."

"What did I do?"

"You didn't kiss me."

"Oh, oh, I'm so sorry."

She came back to him, bent down, folded him in her arms, and kissed him. Then she held him.

"Aunt Louise, I'm your beau."

"You are. You're my best beau," she said wistfully.

"Who's that? Is that you, Louise?" Mary O'Flaherty called from the kitchen.

"Yes, Mother."

"Louise, Louise."

"Is something the matter, Mother?"

"Here, here's a telegram. Come and read it and let me know if anybody died."

Louise took the telegram and looked at it.

"No, Mother," she said, "nobody's dead. Al will be home at eight-fifteen tonight."

Mary O'Flaherty pushed back her chair noisily and stood up. She began to tuck in her straggling hair. Then she tried to smooth out her wrinkled apron. She sat down again.

"Oh, I'm tired, Louise. You clean up the house for me son Al."

X

It had been a good trip, he'd made good sales, and wherever he went he was making a good impression in the shoe business. Shoe men were getting to know what a hustler Al O'Flaherty was.

Now he sat in the parlor, smoking a Regensburg cigar and feeling just fine. The house was clean as a whistle. Everything was calm. His mother looked neat and fresh. He liked her clean gingham apron. He smiled, thinking about her old country superstition about the typewriter. He'd instructed her that he wanted Louise to become proficient on it. Yes, things seemed to be all in hand here at home. It was a fine thing he'd done, to make a happy home. This was his answer to all those cheap, wiseacre salesmen like Alec Strong who kidded him about being a bachelor. He was proud of what he was doing to give his family a better life. When he'd been a boy and the old gent had had to support them all driving a horse and wagon, how poor they had been! He remembered how even on his first job, wrapping shoes at Murphy's shoe store, he had determined to be a success and he'd dreamed of better things for himself and his family. He had made his dreams come true.

Contentedly he blew thick, blue smoke rings.

Mother was out in the back, listening to Louise read her the newspaper. The old gent was asleep. The boy was in the land of slumber, too. And Peg ought to be home any minute now. She was due, past due. She'd be surprised to find him home. He hadn't been expected so soon, but he'd gotten a wire from the factory to see some shoe men here in Chicago. He'd get some juicy orders out of them. Then he'd go away again and finish off this trip in style.

The sound of Louise's soft voice came to him from the dining room. It was a fine, cultivated voice. It couldn't be more cultivated even if she had gone to a finishing school. He wished he could have sent her to one. But then, it was better

to thank God for blessings received than to think of what couldn't be. He said a quick prayer of thanks to God.

Yes, Louise was developing into a gracious lady. But she looked so tired tonight. Worry suddenly shadowed his face. Quickly he told himself to think of the best and not the worst, and the best would come true. Louise's delicate health would—it must—improve. He puffed hard on his cigar and tried to think of how different this big apartment, in a good neighborhood, was from the place they'd lived in on Twelfth Street. That crowded home and those cold winter days. The old gent going out before dawn, and his mother up before dawn. Well, he had changed all that.

Al pulled out his thick gold Waltham watch. It was ninety-three. A Waltham was the best watch, and he especially liked owning one because he'd been in Waltham and had seen the factory there.

Wasn't it time for Peg to be home? He understood that a girl would want to go out and enjoy herself, but the people Peg went with, and especially that man, Lorry Robinson. He was a case. Well, with the help of the Lord, Peg would change and come to her senses.

It was time she should be home.

Al, a short man sitting in a big chair, puffed on his cigar to calm his growing impatience.

Chapter Four

I

IT WAS good he'd come back. He'd gotten a big, juicy order today, and everything was now serene at home and, God willing, things would continue to go on this way. Al glanced around the dinner table, feeling a flush of pride. His mother and father, his two sisters and Danny, all gathered here in happiness. It gave him a strong feeling of home and made up for the many lonely nights he spent on the road in hotels.

"Here, here, fellow, nix, nix," Al said as Danny began to talk.

"I like streetcars," Danny went on, speaking with a mouthful of food.

"No, no," Al said, leaning toward Danny.

"But I do like streetcars."

"Don't talk with your mouth full of food," Al said.

"Ah, we're lucky to have the food in our mouths," Mary O'Flaherty said. "Many's the time I've seen people go without, many's the time. Pa here knows I speak the truth."

"Indeed, Mary, yes indeed I do," Old Tom said.

"Here, here, Father," Al exclaimed.

Tom turned toward his son with a blank expression on his face.

"The knife and fork, the knife and fork."

Tom looked down at his knife and fork resting diagonally against his plate. Old Tom knew what Al meant, but he feigned surprise.

"You don't do it that way. That's not the way to eat."

"Now, Al, don't you go to criticizing Father," Margaret said.

"I'm not criticizing—I'm only trying to show him the right way to handle his gastronomic instruments."

"Oh, Al, you can't teach an old dog like him new tricks," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"My knife and fork are right," Danny said boastfully.

"You're a little gentleman, Brother," Aunt Margaret said.

"Look, Father, see what I do. I lay my knife across the plate this way," Al explained, pointing to the knife which was laid across one edge of his plate. "Father," Al went on ingratiatingly, "I've explained to you before—you're a retired gentleman now, and you want to have manners. You don't want to eat the way they do in the old country."

"Yes, that I do, Al," Tom answered, putting his knife and fork on the plate the way Al wanted them.

"That's the ticket, that's the ticket," Al said cheerfully.

• "Aunt Peg, I want to hear Doc Baker sing," Danny said.

"Oh, he's not at the show tonight."

"Why?"

"He's at another show."

"Why isn't he?"

"Because he goes around from one show to another, singing, and he travels to other cities."

"When's he coming back?"

"Gosh, I don't know."

"I don't think he's in Chicago," Louise remarked.

"Will you take me to see him next week?"

"I'd love to when he comes, but I don't think he'll be here, Brother."

"When will he be?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"She told you she doesn't know," Al interrupted impatiently.

"Now, don't be cross with him, Al, he's only a baby," Margaret said.

"No, I'm not a baby."

"Of course you're not, Little Brother."

"Are you staying in tonight, Peg?" Al asked.

"I have a right to go out," Margaret answered.

"But I only asked you, Peg. I was thinking we would all be home together and we'd have a nice family evening."

"Al, Al, she's running out to God knows where, gallivantin' with tinkers and married men. Al, don't let her go out gallivantin'," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Mother, you lie!" Margaret shot back.

"I lie, do I? Don't you be telling your old mother she lies," Mary O'Flaherty answered.

Margaret began to cry.

"Look at her now. Well might she cry," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"You've abused me since I was a baby," Margaret sobbed.

"Please, Mother," Louise began.

"Now, now, let's have peace and a family evening," Al said.

"A goddamned family evening," Margaret shouted, getting up and leaving the table.

"Al, give it to her," Mary O'Flaherty said. "Give it to her good."

Tom looked down at his plate.

"Mother, Mother, please, soft-pedal it, soft-pedal it," Al pleaded.

II

"He's the nosiest man on earth," Peg said to Louise bitterly. "And he's ruining my life."

They sat in their bedroom off the hallway.

"Peg, don't be blue."

"What the hell business is it of his who I see? Whoever I see is a better man than he is."

"I don't think Al meant . . ." Louise began.

"Chippy talk!" Mary O'Flaherty called in through the open bedroom door, and then she disappeared.

"Why, you goddamned old hag!" Margaret screamed.

From the parlor they heard Al angrily exclaim, "Jesus Christ!"

Louise tightened up with fear.

"Peg, please don't lose your head," Louise urged.

"What the hell are you talking about? You're on his side too. If he only knew about you what I know."

"Peg, what did I do to you?"

"Who wore my brand new black silk stockings with the clocks on them?"

"But, Peg, you told me to wear them."

"If I didn't, you'd have stolen them."

Louise began to cry.

"You hypocrite," Margaret screamed at Louise.

"You're just mean and nasty, Peg O'Flaherty, you're a mean and nasty girl."

• "And what are you, Louise O'Flaherty, you whore, you sick, consumptive whore."

"The nerve of you to say that to me! Oh, oh," Louise sobbed.

Al rushed into the room and exclaimed, "In the name of the Lord Harry."

"Put a switch to their backsides, Al. A switch. Switch their backsides black and blue, Al," Mary O'Flaherty called in.

"Come on, you're both sisters and lovely girls. You're princesses. Make up and forget it," Al said conciliatingly.

Louise shook with sobs. Margaret sank into a chair and began to cry. Al looked helplessly from one sister to the other.

"If I had me way, I'd give 'em bread and water, bread and water," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Al turned around, took a step toward his mother in the hallway, and said:

"Mother, don't you have something to do?"

"Well might they cry."

"Mother, you go out in the back and don't add fuel to the fire."

"The two of them, well may they cry."

Al gave his mother a gentle push to get her out of the doorway.

"Take your hands off me," she barked at him angrily.

Margaret jumped up.

"Don't you dare lay a hand on my mother," she cried out dramatically.

"Go ahead, Mother," Al urged.

"Don't lay a hand on me or I'll call the police," Mary O'Flaherty cried out.

"Brute! Brute! You beat me when I was a little girl, a baby. Brute! Hitting your old mother," Margaret shouted.

"What in the name of God's got into the lot of ye?" Old Tom asked, suddenly appearing in the hallway.

"You get the hell out of here," Al shot back at his father.

"Oh, I wish I was dead," Louise sobbed.

"Oh, that I were a man! Oh, but let God make me a man and would I be the devil rid of every one of you. Pa, go get me the skillet," Mary O'Flaherty cried out, waving her thin arms as she spoke.

Al began to lick his lips. In an outburst of violent anger, he shouted:

"Goddamn it, shut up, everybody!"

III

Danny sat alone in the parlor. They were shouting and fighting, and they made him afraid. He wished they wouldn't shout and fight this way. They were grownup. Grownups fought at home. When they fought, he was afraid.

The bell rang.

Maybe it was the policeman. Maybe the policeman came because they were fighting. Mother said she would call the police. The policemen were nice to him when he got lost.

He bolted out of the parlor. He knew how to press the button for the hall door and let someone in. He pressed the buzzer and then ran to the door. He opened it.

Mrs. Morton, the woman who lived upstairs, stood at the door. She was big and blousy.

"Is your Aunt Peg home, little boy?"

"Yes," he answered in a low voice.

"Can I see her? Call her, little boy."

"My Uncle Al doesn't like you and he says we are not to let you in our house."

"Why . . ."

"He doesn't want you to see Aunt Peg. He says you are a bad woman and you aren't supposed to see me or talk to me."

"Why, you bad, naughty little boy."

"Oh, Martha," Margaret called from the hallway by her bedroom.

Louise could be heard sobbing.

"I've never been so insulted in all my life. If that bad little boy was mine I'd whip him within an inch of his life."

Danny jutted his jaw out.

"Go upstairs," he said to Mrs. Morton.

"Dirty Irish!" Mrs. Morton exclaimed contemptuously.

"Martha," Margaret called out loudly as Mrs. Morton turned away from the front door.

"The dirty little bra!!!" Mrs. Morton exclaimed as she moved toward the steps leading to her apartment on the second floor.

"Martha, dearie," Margaret called out.

"I don't blame you, Peg. You're the only good one in this whole pack of fighting, dirty Irish." She turned on the steps and, facing Margaret, she said in a melodramatic voice, "Peg, my poor, sad heart bleeds for you. But I'll never set foot across the door of your home as long as I live—not after the way I've been insulted."

She broke into tears and rushed, noisy and heavy-footed, up the stairs. Margaret stood in the doorway, stunned.

The front door of Mrs. Morton's apartment was heard slamming with a loud bang. Then, very quickly, she was heard upstairs stamping her feet.

"You nasty little brat! You bad boy!" Margaret shouted at Danny.

IV

Old Tom O'Flaherty sat on his bed with the door closed. Ah, the fighting and the way they were carrying on was a caution. Yes, it was a caution, no mistaking that. And he was better off keeping out of it than getting into it. He was too old to take a hand in it, and if he did, he might never hear the end of it from Mary, and when they all went at one another, sure, you didn't know who was fighting with who, and it would be enough to put gray hairs on his old head, if his hair wasn't already gray.

They were at it in the bedrooms, and in the hallway, and outside his door, and he only hoped to God Al wouldn't be hitting one of the girls. But he was too old to stop Al or any of them, and the way Al sometimes bossed him, why, you'd think Al was the father and he might be the son.

—Say, who died and made you boss?

His married daughter Lizz liked to say that, and here in this very house she had been fighting with Al, and Al told her to go home and take care of her kids and her man and her house, and Lizz had reared up on her hind legs and said it to Al, and that had been a fight, too.

—Who died and made you boss?

He wasn't dead yet, but his oldest son, Al, had made himself the boss, and the life and strength wasn't in him to be doing a thing about it. God have mercy on him, he'd be dead soon enough, and then Al could be the boss of the house and good luck to him. Because his oldest son, Al, and no man alive could be the boss of Mary O'Flaherty.

They were still at it. Fighting and screaming and cursing, and the neighbors up and down the block must be listening, because with the noise and the racket they were making, fighting and screaming and cursing at the top of their voices, they could be heard near and far. There was Mary now.

"The curse of God . . ."

Old Tom sighed. Better off, he was, better off just sitting here with his door closed.

V

"You bad little boy! You brat!" Margaret shouted at Danny.

"Don't you lay as much as a finger on me grandson."

"Lizz O'Neill's brat. Lizz O'Neill's pleasure. Why doesn't she take him home?" Margaret went on.

She started to shake Danny.

"Don't you ever talk that way again to any of my friends."

"It's true what I said," said Danny.

"Take your hands off me grandson, you hussy, you bitch, you whore, you streetwalker, you daughter of the devil," Mrs. O'Flaherty shouted.

"What did you do now?" Al snapped at Danny.

"He insulted my best friend," Margaret exclaimed.

"It's true what I said," Danny stubbornly insisted in a nervous voice.

"Ah, my life is ruined. I'm leaving this place forever," Margaret announced.

"I only told Mrs. Morton you didn't want her in our house because you said so, you said she is a bad woman," Danny explained to his uncle.

"You've done enough. You should be seen and not heard," Margaret told him.

"Listen, you, you just mind your own business and don't answer the doorbell," Al barked at him.

Danny stared at Al and Aunt Margaret in the parlor, and then at his grandmother in the entrance to the room. The way they were acting, they almost looked like people he'd never seen before.

Chapter Five

I

THE soft, spring twilight was turning into darkness over Indiana Avenue. The house was quiet. Mary O'Flaherty sat in the parlor, her spectacles pushed forward on her sharp nose. She stared over them at the newspaper. Tom O'Flaherty sat in the parlor too. He was also wearing glasses, looking over them at a newspaper. He emitted a low exclamation of interest. Mary O'Flaherty rattled her paper.

Margaret had just washed the supper dishes. She stopped quietly as she came by the parlor door. Neither her mother nor her father let on that they had heard her or knew she was watching them. She put her hand over her mouth as she smiled, turned, and walked away on tiptoe. Mary O'Flaherty quickly looked after her. Tom did likewise. Mary O'Flaherty stole a glance at Tom. They caught themselves looking at each other and instantly turned their eyes back to their newspapers.

From the dining room came the sounds of Louise's typewriter. Suddenly they stopped. Then, from the rear of the apartment, came the low sounds of whispering. Mary O'Flaherty glanced at the hallway off the parlor. Tom swiftly and furtively looked in the same direction and then once again stared over his glasses at the newspaper.

Tom sighed. Mary O'Flaherty formed words with her lips. There was a strained look on her face.

In a moment Al, Margaret, and Louise came tiptoeing into the parlor. For a brief instant they all stood by the door. Margaret was smiling broadly. Louise licked her lips and put

her long, slender right hand to her face, struggling not to giggle. Al winked at Margaret and then at Louise.

Mary O'Flaherty and Tom gave no sign of awareness of the presence of their children.

Louise broke out in uncontrollable laughter.

Tom rattled his paper and directed an angry frown at his children. Mary O'Flaherty looked up and said curtly:

"You can be occupying yourselves and not be interfering with me and me man."

Louise bent over with laughter.

"And look at that one, will you, Mary? Tell me, what in the name of God Himself does she see to be laughing at?"

"Mother, you look like a doll, and Father, you're the sweetest thing there is."

"If I put a switch to your backside, you wouldn't be calling me a doll," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Look at that one—is something wrong with her?" Tom asked with mock anger, pointing at Louise, who still couldn't stop laughing.

The whole apartment echoed her girlish laughter.

"Father, what's the news?" Al asked, his face suddenly expressionless.

"I'm trying out me new glasses. It has something to say here about President Taft," Tom said.

"Father, I didn't know you needed glasses. Where did you get them?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, I got me a pair at the Woolworth store—isn't that what you call it? The five-cent and ten-cent store."

"Didn't you get fitted, Father?" asked Louise.

"Yes, you have to get fitted and have your eyes examined," Al explained to his father.

"Ah, they're a wonderful fit, a wonderful fit," Tom told them, the spectacles still falling way down on his nose.

"They're no better than mine," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"And, Mother, you too?" Margaret asked.

"Can't I wear a pair of glasses if I want to? They become me," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"But I thought your eyes were so perfect, Mother," Margaret said.

"Indeed they are."

"Then why do you have to wear glasses? Goodness, I wish I didn't need glasses for my poor eyes," Margaret told her.

"They're me readin' and me going-out glasses."

Louise walked over and glanced down over her father's shoulder. She caught Margaret's eye and winked. Margaret moved toward Old Tom, and Al, noticing his sisters, did likewise.

"Father, what are you reading?" Margaret asked.

"I'll tell you to be mindin' your own business and let me be."

Louise burst out in laughter again. Bending over, she said!

"The newspaper's . . . it's . . . it's . . . upside down."

Old Tom rustled his paper, frowned, and stood up.

"If I was to put the strap to you, you'd be mindin' your own business and showing a proper respect for your father."

"Oh, Father, you're such a darling!" Louise exclaimed.

"Darling, is it? Darling in a pig's foot."

"If you both need glasses," Al said, "I'll send you to a good oculist to have your eyes examined."

"Who says that me eyes need examin'g?" Old Tom asked.

"Well, you have glasses, don't you?"

"Oh, Al, he don't need them. Sure, what in the name of God, what good will glasses be doing him?"

"You know, Mary O'Flaherty, you bought glasses because I did," Tom told her.

"Me glasses, I'll have you know, are me own business," she said.

"Come on, let me read the paper to both of you," Margaret said.

"Here, Peg, read me who's dead," Mary O'Flaherty said, handing the newspaper to Margaret.

II

Now, now she didn't want to think about it, she didn't. It couldn't be that she was going to die young, it just couldn't be. Because she hadn't even lived yet. Oh, it couldn't be, and God wouldn't take her and call her away when she was young and had all of her dreams of living.

"I told you, don't say I never warned you about that typewriter."

"Mother, please don't nag me."

"Nag you, sure, who in the name of God is nagging you?"

"It wasn't the typewriter," Louise said, and then she fell into morose silence.

"You poor girl," Mary O'Flaherty said affectionately. "Let me make you a nice hot cup of tea. I'll have it made in a jiffy before you can count two shakes of a lamb's tail," Mary said, quickly leaving the parlor.

Louise began to hum, at first unaware that she was humming. Then she sang:

"Come, come, I love you only, my heart's delight."

—I'm singing, she told herself.

She looked at the piano. Al had bought it for her. She remembered him saying to her:

—I'll make you into a young lady with accomplishments. She never played the piano any more.

Come, come, I love you only . . .

—I don't want to die, she told herself.

"Come on now, Louise, I have a warm cup of tea for you. Come and drink it. It'll be good for whatever ails you."

Louise rose.

"Ah, Louise, you're a good girl, and I don't mean half of the things I do be saying," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Louise followed her mother out of the parlor.

"Pa, did you look after me grandson?" Mary O'Flaherty said as she entered the dining room.

Sitting by the table smoking his corn-cob, Old Tom hesitated for a moment before answering.

"Sure and he's diggin' in the back yard, Mary."

"Come, Pa, and have a warm cup of tea."

They all went into the kitchen.

A sadness seemed to emanate from them, to float about and permeate the kitchen. Tom seemed about to say something, and Mary turned toward him, waiting for what he would say, but he didn't speak. He lifted his cup of tea and drank.

Louise gazed at her parents. Then she stared absently at the stove, the window, the back door. Her father and mother were old. When would they die? When would her father go? Would it be before her mother? She didn't want them to die. And maybe they wouldn't, not before her. She remembered once when she was a little girl, she must have been about eight, and she'd been walking alone on Twelfth Street, and when she'd gotten home she had been so sad she had wanted to cry. She hadn't talked to anyone. She hadn't been able to talk. And she hadn't been able to tell them why, either. She remembered how, walking on Twelfth Street, she had told herself that she didn't ever want to die, and didn't want anybody else ever to die either.

Al had been working in a shoe store then, and when he came home and talked to her she hadn't been able to say anything, and he'd lost his temper. Even in those days he lost his temper, and when she hadn't talked to him because she just couldn't, he'd slapped her, and there'd been a big fight that night because Lizz had wanted to go out to a dance but Al had told her she couldn't go. He and Lizz had shouted at each other, and when it had looked as if Al was going to hit Lizz, Lizz had run into the kitchen and grabbed a bread knife. She remembered herself crying and then telling herself;

o —I wish I was dead.

She had been only eight or nine then. Now she was nineteen.

Her father was looking at her as if he wanted to talk to her. He was a dear, a dear dear old father, and she loved him.

"Well, girl, did the sea make you feel better?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"Sometimes there's nothing better than a good cup of tea for a person," he said.

"Yes, Father—don't you want me to pour you a fresh cup?" Louise asked.

Tom watched Louise with gratitude as she poured him another cup of tea. Tom didn't want more tea. He was drinking it just to be doing something. At times he wished he wasn't retired. Being around a home with women, running errands and going to the store and playing nursemaid for his grandson and doing the things that Mary told him to do and sitting here, drinking tea with Mary and his youngest daughter, Louise, sure, and what kind of a life was this for him? And was this what he had worked hard for all these years? By God, it wasn't much, little enough it was, yes, little enough. What with the worrying and the poverty, and the long days in the cold, and raising a family, and a man got little enough out of his life and his old age sitting at home like this, no longer the man in his own home. And it wouldn't be long before he would be dead, and they'd be carrying his bones to that plot of ground he and Mary owned in Calvary Cemetery. He'd worked hard for it, hard to pay that fifty dollars it cost, and now the time would be coming when they would be laying him away, his old bones, in that plot of ground.

Pains and aches and knowing that you didn't have the strength in you that you once had. Ah, a man got little enough out of life here in America. Old Tom finished his tea, got up, and left the kitchen.

"Louise," Mary O'Flaherty said in a half whisper, leaning forward over the table as she spoke. "Louise, I tell you, your

father, sometimes I think he's ailin'—the poor man, sometimes he is like a man who is ailin'."

Louise said nothing. Her lovely face was drawn. She should feel sorry, and she should want to do something, if only it was to pray and go to confession to Father Costello this Saturday night instead of going out on her date. She would offer up a Holy Communion for her father. But she was thinking of herself, and worrying about herself, and dreaming about the dress she was going downtown this afternoon to buy.

Chapter Six

I

DRESSING slowly, Louise had closed the door, sat on the bed, and felt her upright young breasts. She stroked them, pressed them gently, and then rubbed her hands simultaneously over them. She liked the touch of the soft skin. She was proud of her breasts. Then she looked at them in the mirror and again caressed them.

Her eyes shone, and for a moment she looked ecstatically happy. She turned from the mirror, ashamed of herself. She shouldn't do this. It was bad. But, still, she liked to play with her breasts. It was bad to think of it, but when you were in love and were married, your husband played with your breasts and kissed them and that wasn't bad, was it? Mr. Robinson must play with Peg's breasts.

Louise went on dressing. Slowly and dreamily she laced her corsets. She was going downtown this afternoon to meet Peg and buy a new dress. It would bring her good luck and happiness. Oh, she wished she had so many clothes, just all kinds of beautiful dresses that she would wear for. . . . For whom? For him, but she didn't know him. He would be younger than Peg's Mr. Robinson but as handsome. Mr. Robinson was kind of handsome, but he would be handsomer. And Mr. Robinson was married; he wouldn't be married.

He would discover her, just as the Prince had discovered Cinderella. Then he would make her the happiest girl in the world. And perhaps buying this dress today would be the beginning of this, and today would be the day that would change her life and the day when it all would begin. Today!

Louise stared at herself in the mirror, seeing the image of

herself as though she were seeing a stranger. This girl was pale and her beauty was so fragile. Her rich, auburn hair seemed to be almost too heavy for her long, thin, delicate face.

She heard so much talk about happiness. Al spoke of happiness. She had grown up, thinking and dreaming that one day, when she was grown up and a young woman, she would be happy. But she had never seen much happiness, not in her own home, not in the other homes around her when she was a kid. Were drinking and fighting and cursing happiness? And wasn't that what she had seen and heard again and again? She could remember the poverty, the cold houses in winter, and the times when her own father and mother, or someone else's father and mother, had been drunk. Who was happy? Her father wasn't. So often she would look at him, and his face and his eyes seemed so sad. And her mother—was she happy? Yes, maybe she was. But who else in the family was? Peg wasn't. She loved Mr. Robinson, a married man, and she sinned. Peg loved him. Oh, she felt sorry for Peg. And her sister Lizz was too poor to be happy. And her brother Al, was he? She didn't know.

Was it only her own family that wasn't happy? Or was this the way life was?

She didn't know. She hadn't lived much yet. But she was nineteen, and she was grown up. She was old enough to begin to live.

Louise went to the closet to get her blue silk dress.

—When, she asked herself, would she begin to live and to be happy? On what day would her whole life be changed?

II

Danny was holding onto the railing, hopping down the front steps and talking to himself when Louise came out of the building. He saw her instantly and shouted:

"Aunt Louise! Aunt Louise!"

She knew what was coming.

"Where are you going?" Danny asked, standing before her on the steps and clutching at her blue dress.

"I'm going downtown to meet Aunt Peg, and she's going to help me pick out a dress."

"Take me with you!"

The commanding tone of Danny's voice confused her. She didn't know how to refuse him.

"Oh, I can't take you this time," she told him uncertainly.

"I want to go with you!"

"I'll take you some other day."

"I won't let you go without me!"

"But I can't," she said, almost apologetically.

He clutched more tightly at her long blue skirt, his stubborn chin jutting out, his lips compressed with determination.

"Oh, don't, don't, please don't . . . you'll get my dress dirty."

"Take me downtown with you in the streetcar."

"I can't today, Danny boy. But Auntie Louise will make it up to you some other time."

"I won't let you go!"

"Please."

He barred her way.

She stepped around him and started walking down the stairs. She didn't want him to embarrass her in front of the neighborhood by making a fuss and screaming. And she didn't want to take him with her today. Or did she? She didn't know now. She did love this little boy. He was her live doll to play with and fondle. And she wanted his childhood to be happier than hers had been. She halted at the foot of the stairway, undecided.

"You're not dressed to go downtown," she told him.

"I want to go."

"No, I can't take you today."

"I want to go," Danny screamed at her.

"Don't pull at my dress that way."

"I want to go to the Loop with you," Danny screamed.

Suddenly the parlor window of the O'Flaherty apartment on the first floor opened and Mary O'Flaherty stuck her head out.

"What's happening to me grandson?"

"He won't let me go out, Mother. He's being bad, that's all."

Danny stood by Louise's side, sullenly determined. His face was streaked from his tears and very dirty.

"Go run off and play, son, and let your aunt be," Mary O'Flaherty called to him.

"I want to go with Aunt Louise!"

Gazing down on him, Louise's face softened. Why couldn't she take him with her? He was fun and a joy, not a trouble.

"All right, Danny, I'll take you."

Danny's face broke into a smile. She took his small, sweaty hand, liking the feel of it in hers. People on the streetcar and downtown would think she was the little fellow's mother. Oh, she liked that. And sometimes the thought of it made her blush because . . .

She waved good-bye to her mother. Hand in hand they crossed the street to take the car.

"You like your Aunt Louise, do 't you?"

"I love you, Aunt Louise."

"Will you always love me?"

"I'll always love you, Aunt Louise."

She feared that she would cry right here in the street. Oh, the innocence of this little boy! She squeezed his hand tightly. Now she had control. She wouldn't cry.

III

The Loop-bound Indiana streetcar was crowded. Holding Danny's hand, Louise edged him with her toward the center of the vehicle from the back platform. She noticed the greedy eyes of a man on her, and she shuddered slightly. In crowded cars, men sometimes tried to press themselves against her. They frightened her. This man was edging nearer. He looked

repulsive. She moved Danny in front of her and glanced off so as not to have to meet the stranger's greedy stare.

"I want a seat!" Danny shouted.

Louise blushed, and the leering man went completely out of her mind.

"Don't—hush!" she said.

Passengers were staring at them. Some were smiling. Danny looked up at her defiantly.

"I want a seat!" he shouted again.

"Don't . . . don't," Louise told him, still blushing with embarrassment.

"Here, young man," a man called.

"You can't do this on a streetcar," Louise said to Danny.

"The gentleman wants to give the little boy a seat," a woman told Louise.

The man who had called to Danny was motioning from a rear seat.

"I want my seat!"

"Here it is, young man."

Holding onto Louise's hand, Danny began to shove his way toward the man. Louise was still blushing as she followed him. Then, suddenly, it all seemed so funny to her that she wanted to laugh.

The man who had called to Danny was tall and refined-looking; his hair was beginning to gray around the temples. He rose and beamed at Danny.

As Danny took the seat a gleam of triumph came into his blue eyes.

"Oh, thank you . . . you shouldn't have done this—he could stand," Louise said, flustered.

But Danny's spirit made her proud.

"Oh, Madam, it's nothing—a little fellow as spirited as that deserves a seat."

"Thank you," Louise said demurely.

"Young man," the man said, bending down and gazing at

Danny with a twinkle in his eyes, "young man, you will go far in this world."

Louise thrilled with pride. This man took Danny to be her own son.

"Madam, you have a fine little boy there," the man said.

"He's my nephew—my sister's boy," Louise said shyly.

Oh, she just wished that Danny were her own son.

IV

His aunts were gone. Gone. They left him alone, all alone in the Loop full of all these strangers. People crushed, hurried, and walked by him on downtown State Street, and the noise of the street drove fear into his ears. They were passing him, going this way, that way. He had never seen them before. One of them might grab him and kidnap him. One of them might be the bogeyman and take him away and never let him go home again.

He looked up at passing people with panicky eyes, searching for Aunt Louise, Aunt Margaret, Aunt Louise. He had been with them, and now he wasn't with them. He was lost. He was lost on State Street. He looked with still frightened eyes for Aunt Louise in the crowd of people on State Street. There was no Aunt Louise.

He began to cry. At first, a few tears came haltingly. Then they streamed down his face. He trembled. He still looked about, seeking, searching, staring at strange grownups through his tears. He wanted his Aunt Louise to find him so that he wouldn't be lost any more.

He began to bawl. Several people stopped. A woman bent down.

"What's the matter, little boy?" she asked in a soothing voice.

It made him angry because it wasn't the voice of Aunt Louise.

"Is the kid hurt?" a man asked.

"There was a small crowd collected around him now.

"Tell me, little boy—what is the matter? I'll help you," the woman said, her voice kind and soft.

"I'm lost," he sobbed.

"Now, don't you cry, don't you cry. I'll take care of you."

Mother had told him never to talk to strangers on the street, never to go with strangers.

He looked anxiously past the woman, seeing feet and legs and dresses, and he saw, as in a daze, the faces of the people around him. They wouldn't hurt him.

"Don't cry, little boy. Tell me your name."

"Daniel O'Neil."

"And where do you live, Daniel?"

"I lost my Aunt Louise. I was with my Aunt Louise and my Aunt Peg. They're gone. I lost them."

"Where did you lose them?"

"Huh."

"I think the thing to do is to turn him over to the police," remarked a man in the crowd.

"I don't want the police. I want my aunt," Danny said commandingly.

"The police won't hurt you. They'll find your aunt for you," the lady said.

"I want them to find my aunt."

"Where were you? Where is your aunt?"

"Shopping."

"Do you know at what store, Daniel?"

"O'Toole and Ginzburg," Danny blurted out.

He'd remembered this name because Uncle Al mentioned it often at home.

"Come. I'll take you there," the lady said.

She took Danny by the hand. He looked up at the people around him, terrified.

Danny had refused to go inside the store. He stood at the entrance to the shoe store on State Street, watching. He wasn't

afraid any more because he knew where he was. He was at O'Toole and Ginzburg's. Nothing would happen to him now. Aunt Louise and Aunt Peg would come and get him here.

He looked at the people with curiosity. People went shopping in the Loop. They went to work. They sold shoes.

He watched them pass.

"Why, Little Brother," Aunt Margaret exclaimed with joy and relief.

"We were just going to go to the police, Danny. What happened to you?" Aunt Louise asked.

"You lost me."

They both gazed at him in surprise.

"We didn't lose you. We were looking in the store window and when we looked down for you, you were gone," Aunt Louise told him.

"We looked all the way up and down State Street for you," Aunt Margaret said.

"We were so worried," Aunt Louise said.

"We wouldn't lose you, Little Brother, for all the world," Aunt Margaret said.

"Take me home to Mother," Danny said.

"We will, just as soon as we finish our shopping, Little Brother," Aunt Margaret told him.

And with Danny between them, each of them holding him by one hand, Louise and Margaret walked off on State Street. Danny was happy now. He felt safe. His Aunt Louise hadn't lost him or run away from him.

"Auntie Louise, buy me some ice cream."

"I'd like a soda myself, darling," Margaret said.

"I want ice cream."

"You darling boy, your two aunts will buy you some ice cream right away," Margaret said.

"We'll go to Alligretti's," Louise said.

"I want chocolate ice cream," Danny said; his voice rang with happiness.

SECTION TWO

Chapter Seven

I

LIZZ O'NEILL was taller than her mother but not so tall as Louise or Margaret. Her skin was very clear, and her hair, combed simply, was black and straight, very silky, and quite beautiful. She was full-bosomed and a little stout. Wearing an old and ill-fitting dark dress, she nonetheless was a handsome woman.

From the front of the apartment there was noise as Danny played with his nine-year-old brother Bill and his little sister Margaret. Lizz and Mary O'Flaherty sat over a cup of tea in the kitchen.

"What will Jim do for his supper?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"Oh, my Jim can fix his own supper. My Jim can do all kinds of things. He can take care of little Dennis as well as I can. I need never worry about leaving my Jim."

"Too bad he couldn't earn you a better living," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"He works hard, Mother—he works every bit as hard as Father did. And he's a proud man. He wouldn't ask for a thing—he's that proud."

"Them that has to 'umble must 'umble," Mary O'Flaherty pronounced. "So Jim was drunk, was he, and he couldn't go to work today? He was drunk, you say?"

"He was sorry, he was, too, when I got through with him. I gave him a piece of my mind—oh, Mother, you should have heard the way I talked to him. And I took him to Father Herman at the German Church, and he took the pledge."

"It's about time. With all those mouths to feed, and him out in a saloon, the long drink of water."

"Mother, Jim is a good man. He is. Every payday, Mother . . ." Lizz paused, put out her fat, work-worn right hand with its red palm, and pointing at it with her left hand she went on, "Every payday he puts the pay envelope right there."

"Your father," Mary O'Flaherty said belligerently, "your father . . ." She rapped the oilcloth on the kitchen table. "He knew better, oh, indeed he did, he knew better than not to bring his wages home to me."

"How is Father?"

"He'll be in any minute now. Ah, he's out somewhere or other, seeing some men he knows."

"I want to see my father."

"You will. That you will. He'll be here when it's time for supper."

"Oh, Mother, I almost forgot to tell you about Aggie Dillon's wake."

Mrs. O'Flaherty leaned forward, and her face came alive with interest.

"Tell me, Lizz," she said eagerly.

II

"Hello, Lizz," Tom O'Flaherty said dryly, and without feeling.

"Oh, Father, I'm so glad to see you," Lizz exclaimed loudly.

She got up quickly and kissed him on the cheek. Old Tom was embarrassed.

"I came over to see my dear father and my mother."

"How's Jim, Lizz?"

"He was drunk last night," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"You don't say?" Tom said, his eyes lighting up.

"Jim is fine, Father. Why don't you come down to see us? You come and bring my son Daniel and I'll give you lunch. When Jim comes home, you and my Jim can talk and have a can of beer, and Jim can bring you both back here on the streetcar."

"I don't let me grandson be out with anybody after dark," Mrs. O'Flaherty said curtly.

"Say, he's my son—and his father isn't just anybody. Why, if Jim heard you say that he might even take him back home. Mother, you don't know my Jim and what a temper he has."

"Temper? Why, he's a fine man, Lizz, a fine man," Tom said.

Mary O'Flaherty went to the stove and took the big frying pan off. Holding it in her hand, she said in a dramatic voice:

"If any tinker comes here after me grandson, he'll get this over his head."

Old Tom gazed uneasily at his wife.

Mary O'Flaherty put the frying pan back on the stove.

"Here, Lizz, have a cup of tea. Tom, can I give you a cup of tea?"

Danny appeared at the entrance to the kitchen.

"Here's my son," Lizz said, speaking loudly and gaily. She opened her arms wide. "Come, Daniel, and give your mother a kiss."

"Come here, son, and kiss me, your grandmother, first," Mary O'Flaherty said instantly.

Danny stared at his mother, then at his grandmother. He wished he could be two people at once so he could kiss them both first. He was afraid. He stood in the kitchen doorway, unable to go first to either Mother or Mama.

"I want a glass of milk," he said.

"Here, I'll get it for you, son."

He looked at Mama. She was his mother. He called Mother Mother. He called his mother Mama. What was your mother? Mama was his mother. But he didn't call her Mother. Mother was Uncle Al's mother. She was Mama's mother. She was Aunt Louise's mother. She was Aunty Peg's mother. She was his grandmother.

"This is for you, son," Mary O'Flaherty said, handing Danny a glass of milk.

"Mother, you know, me and my Jim, we're glad we can let

our son Daniel stay with you," Lizz said with sugared but unmistakable irony. "Oh, yes, we're glad you have our precious to stay with you and my father, so that the two of you aren't all alone at night when the rest of them are out or away. I'm a good daughter, and that's why I let you have my son."

Danny gulped down the milk. Then, as Mother started to say something to Mama, he bolted out of the room back to the parlor.

III

"Aunty Peg?"

Danny's voice was most appealing.

Behind him stood Bill, with a face of nine-year-old nonchalance, and Little Margaret, giggling in excitement.

The grownups, Mother, Mama, Aunty Peg, and Aunt Louise, were seated around the dining-room table drinking their tea. Aunt Margaret was smoking a cigarette.

"What do you want, Little Brother?"

"We want to throw shoes at Father's door."

"Oh, but poor grandfather is tired and needs his sleep. You don't want to wake him up, do you, Little Brother?"

"No," Danny answered thoughtfully but with a look of disappointment on his face. "No, but, please, Aunty Peg, let us throw shoes at Father's door."

"Don't you have a game all three of you can play?" Aunt Louise asked.

"We want to throw shoes," Danny answered.

"I want to throw shoes," Little Margaret said.

"Oh, let them. There's no harm in it," Mary O'Flaherty remarked.

"But Father will get mad," Peg said.

"That's why we want to throw shoes."

Danny spoke with such transparent honesty that all four grownups laughed. Danny screwed up his face. He wasn't trying to get them to laugh. Then his features changed, opened up in a charming smile.

"Ah, go ahead, Peg, and let them have their fun. Pa won't mind. Sure, Pa loves the children," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Pa was wonderful to me when I was a little girl," Margaret remarked, nostalgia creeping into her voice.

"He was to me, too," Lizz added hastily, with a trace of hostility.

"But your grandfather might get angry and hit you and hurt you, Danny boy, if you woke him up by throwing shoes at his door," Aunt Louise said.

"I know Pa has a temper," Lizz said.

"Oh, he's the sweetest!"

"Aunty Peg," Danny said, interrupting his Aunt Margaret.

"Yes, Little Brother."

"Please say we can throw shoes."

• "Go ahead and play, Little Brother."

Danny gazed at her questioningly for a few seconds. Then he took Little Margaret by the hand and, starting to run, pulled her along the small narrow hallway.

"Bill, Bill, we can do it," he called exultantly.

IV

Danny and Bill gazed at each other like conspirators. Little Margaret watched them carefully. Each one held a shoe.

"One for the money," Danny said, looking down the hallway at his grandfather's bedroom door.

Danny threw his shoe; Little Margaret flung hers, but it fell short. Bill let his shoe fly, and it cracked against the door.

They were all off instantly, turning and running the few feet back of them to the hall bedroom where Danny slept. They laughed as they ran.

They piled into the bed and pulled the quilts and comforters over them. Then they lay quietly, snug and warm together in the dark, waiting in silence.

Danny felt that he couldn't wait. He wanted to laugh. He couldn't laugh. Father might not know where they were. If

he laughed, Father would know. He would give it away if he laughed.

He hoped the razor strap wouldn't hurt. It wouldn't. They had fooled Father. They fooled Father because they got under the blankets—so many blankets that when Father came and hit them with his razor strap it wouldn't hurt because they were under so many blankets.

Little Margaret started to giggle.

"Quiet!" Bill commanded.

She stopped.

They waited under the blankets for a few tense and happy seconds.

Then they heard their grandfather coming on bare feet.

"Shsh," from Bill.

"Shsh," from Danny.

"Shsh," from Little Margaret.

"There you are, you little devils," Old Tom said angrily.

They waited now, pressed close together in the warm darkness under the heavy blankets.

"I'll fix ye, you little devils—wakin' me up out of me sound sleep. I'll . . ."

He brought the razor strap down on the blankets with a heavy wallop.

The three children burst out laughing.

"Laughin' it is you are, you three little imps of Satan. Laughin' . . ."

The strap came down again. It didn't hurt.

They were fooling Father.

"Wakin' an old man out of his sound sleep . . ."

Again the strap came down.

The children laughed.

"I'll teach ye. Take this . . ."

Again the strap.

Again the laughter.

"Spawn of Satan out of Hell. So you'll throw shoes at me door, will you . . ."

Again the strop on the blankets, its noise muffled.

Again the happy, almost hysterical laughter of the three children.

"I'll flay ye within an inch . . ."

The strop came down again.

"I'll teach ye to plague an old man," he growled.

He beat the blankets with the strop. The three children laughed under the blankets.

"What's going on here?" Margaret asked, entering the bedroom.

Old Tom looked at her and winked. She nodded in an understanding response. A broad smile came over her face.

"These little imps of brimstone are throwing shoes at me door, wakin' me up."

"They shouldn't do that."

• "When I finish layin' me razor strop to them, they'll be throwin' no more shoes at an old man's door."

"Don't hurt them, Father."

"Hurt them? I'll lather them black and blue."

He raised the black strop, came down with it hard on the heavy blankets. Little Margaret giggled. Danny laughed. Then Bill haw-hawed.

"Father can't hurt me with his razor strop," Danny said.

"I can't, can't I, you blasted ragamuffin."

Old Tom winked again at Margaret and once more bore down with the razor strop.

"Oooh!" Danny exclaimed as though in pain.

"Are you hurt, Little Brother?" Margaret asked anxiously.

Old Tom looked worried, but Danny laughed joyfully. Little Margaret giggled.

"You children come out now from under those blankets. Your grandfather will forgive you."

"We want to be punished more!" Danny answered.

"No, you've played enough."

"Will Father hurt us?"

"No, I won't hurt ye, ye little imps."

They came out from under the blankets.

"Tell your grandfather you're sorry."

Danny looked at his aunt with twinkling eyes.

"We're sorry, Father."

He beamed down at them.

"You better be," he said, waving his strop.

"Kiss your grandfather good night and promise to be quiet and let him sleep."

"We will."

Old Tom bent down and they kissed his cheek. He turned and went back to his bedroom, thinking what fine little ones they were. Sure, they warmed his heart, little devils that they were.

He closed his door and crawled into bed. He yawned. He was tired now. He didn't want any more playing or devilment from them. He yawned again. There was a kind of pain in his insides. He felt heavy down there. But in a moment he was asleep and snoring lightly.

v

Old Tom opened his eyes in the darkness. He thought he heard something, but it was quiet. The house was still as a mouse. It had been a dream. And the pain had awakened him. Gas and indigestion, they said he had. Little they knew that many a night the pain would wake him up like this.

He put his hands on his abdomen. It was soft and flabby and the muscles were lax. He had heard talk of the appendix and, good God, it could be an appendix he had. And with the appendix, people were carried out on a stretcher and put in an ambulance, and the neighbors stood looking at you, gawking and gaping at you, and they took you to the hospital and gave you the gas and cut your vitals open with a knife, and you died. People died, they died like flies with the appendix.

The pain was gnawing rather than sharp.

He moaned softly.

It wasn't much of a pain. Sure, it was nothing to what he had suffered many's the time in his life, many a time. The pains of the cold on top of a wagon, and the pains the time a box fell on his foot on South Market Street, and the time he broke his arm. It was nothing, nothing at all.

But the pain, dully, quietly, was gnawing inside of him, in his stomach or his intestines, somewhere in his insides, just gnawing, and he couldn't sleep.

What time of night might it be? When would it be morning? He wanted to see the morning, the light and the sunshine outside. When the morning came, with the sun going up, rising high up in the sky, sure, the pain would be gone, and he'd be feeling as fit as a fiddle, and then wouldn't he know that this pain was nothing at all?

He was restless. He wanted to moan, not because of the pain but because he was alone here in the darkness and the pain was enough so that he wasn't able to sleep. But, sure, the morning should be coming soon. He could see himself sitting down to his breakfast, and Mary would be asking him how he was feeling, and he would be telling her:

—Fine, Mary, fine indeed.

And he would look out of the window and see the sun high in the sky. In the old country he used to see the sun high in the sky of a morning with the dew on the fields.

But then he had been young. Now he was an old man, and what was there but pain and sadness left for the likes of himself—pain and sadness in remembering the sun high in the sky and the dew on the ground when he had been a young buck in the old country and Mary had been a girl.

Yes, life was pain and sadness. Coming out to America to make his fortune, and no fortune it was that Tom O'Flaherty had made.

If the morning would only come. But it was tired he was waking up, tired. And time was when he would be up before the crack of dawn and out in the cold on the wagon, and he'd think nothing of it.

He couldn't be going on much longer, he couldn't. He felt his abdomen where the pain gnawed at him. He moaned softly. He lay in the darkness, a frightened old man, waiting for the morning when the sun would be high in the sky, just as it used to be, years ago, in the old cōntry.

Chapter Eight

I

OLD Tom and Danny sat side by side on the streetcar. Danny was at the window. He was glad to be going out with his grandfather on a streetcar. He liked streetcars.

"Father, I know what streetcar we're on now."

"Tell me."

"Wentworth. The Wentworth. Oh, look at that horse and wagon. Father, who drives that horse and wagon? Papa drives a horse and wagon. Where's his horse and wagon?"

"Out somewhere else on the Loop."

The streetcar was about half full. Some of the passengers were watching Danny and Old Tom and listening to their conversation. Danny's chatter brought smiles to the faces of several men and women in the car.

"Uncle Al doesn't drive a horse and wagon."

"No, he doesn't."

"Why does my papa?"

"That's his work. He makes his livin' that way."

"You mean money, Father?"

"Yes, money."

"I want to make money. I want to be a man."

"That you will someday, Danny boy, and it's a fine man you'll be."

The old man's face grew sad. When this little fellow was grown to be a man and was out in the world, sure he himself would be dead and gone, and his old bones would be out in Calvary Cemetery. And Mary, too? Would she be dead and gone?

"Oh, look at the wagon with barrels. I want to drive a wagon like that, with barrels."

Several passengers laughed. They glanced out the streetcar windows and saw a beer truck, loaded with barrels, drawn by two big black horses.

"Father! Father!" Danny exclaimed excitedly.

"What is it now?"

"The horse on the barrel wagon is doing two. Look, Father, he's doing number two."

"Shsh! Shsh! You little divil," Old Tom said in embarrassment as many passengers laughed.

"Look, Father, the horse's is smoking."

"Shsh! Shsh!"

The passengers rocked with laughter.

II

The O'Neills lived on the second floor of a red-brick, two-story building on La Salle Street, between Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Streets. The apartment was cluttered. Little Margaret and the youngest boy, Dennis, toddled about the floor. Danny stood watching them. Lizz, Jim O'Neill, and Old Tom sat in the parlor. Tom was still happily surprised at having found Jim home from work.

"Yes, Tom," Jim was saying, "I strained this hernia of mine liftin' some boxes."

Jim was a big, broad-shouldered, powerful-looking man.

"Man, you have to be careful. A man can't be too careful," Tom said solicitously.

"It's going to be all right, only I had to lay off a few days. It was pretty bad, but now I'm hardly limpin'. I'll be back on the wagon tomorrow."

"No, Jim, you'd better wait at least another day," Lizz interrupted.

"We have to eat."

Old Tom nodded his head at this exchange, thinking that well did he understand how Jim could be worried, with the

little mouths that Jim had to feed. Many's the time he had worried when he was the man of his own house, many's the time.

"I'll write to my brother Al for help."

"I don't want to be beholdin'," Jim said sharply.

Danny kept looking about studiously.

"Mama," he said.

"Yes, my son, yes, Daniel."

"You don't have rugs like Mother does. And you don't have a rug in the hall."

Jim O'Neill paled. His lips trembled in anger and humiliation.

"Ah, Danny, me lad, rugs is nothin'. Nothin' at all. When I was your father's age, me and your grandmother had no rugs."

"Come here!" Jim commanded, catching Danny's eye.

Danny hesitated. Papa made him afraid.

Jim motioned with an index finger. Danny saw the stub where Papa's little finger had been. It was cut off because of a machine, they'd told him.

"When I tell you to come, you come!"

Danny, pale with fear now, slowly went to his father.

"Jim, don't hit him," Lizz said anxiously.

Jim put his hands firmly on Danny's shoulders.

"I'm your father. This is the home of your father and mother. Don't you ever say anything like that again in my home."

"But I didn't—" Danny started to say.

"Shut up! Listen to me!"

"Jim!" Lizz cried out.

With his father's strong, big hands on him, Danny waited. He bit his lip so as not to cry or say anything, but he wanted to say:

—Please, Papa, don't hit me.

"Don't pass remarks about this house. You're always wel-

come, but mind your tongue. Now, go and play with your little brother and sister."

Jim let Danny go.

Tom had watched and listened, wishing he were elsewhere. He'd been fearful his son-in-law was going to give Danny boy a belt and had been of a mind to speak. He was relieved that Jim hadn't hit Danny. He knew Jim wouldn't, but would only lay the law down to the laddie, and a man had to lay the law down. And this laddie would be needing it laid down to him because he had the devil in him, all right, the way he was always saying things, and you just never could know what to expect him to be saying.

And since Jim was home from work, maybe Jim would be wanting to have a glass of beer or a can, and the two of them might just hike to a saloon and leave the boy with his mother.

Old Tom gazed shrewdly at Jim and then at Lizz. He was hesitating to make the suggestion for fear Lizz might take it amiss, because now and again his daughter would get like her mother, and maybe he had better wait a bit or hope for Jim to make the suggestion, for then if Lizz took it amiss and should be telling Mary about it he could say Jim wanted to have a can of beer. Yes, he had better be waiting a little. But he didn't want to be sitting here waiting for so long because he felt the need to be wetting his whistle.

The children drifted out to the dining room in the back of the flat.

"And my mother is well, you say, Father?" Lizz asked.

"Yes, yes, indeed, Lizz," Old Tom said, trying not to show that he wasn't interested.

"I wanted to come the other night and see her, but I just couldn't—Little Margaret had a cough, and I thought it might be the whooping cough."

"She can come and see you," Jim said.

"Oh, Jim, she's old, and she has that house and my son to take care of."

"She can bring him with her."

"Mother is always busy, isn't she, Father?"

Old Tom caught himself just as he was about to say that Mary's tongue was, for a certainty, always busy.

"And you look fine, Father."

"Ah, why shouldn't I?"

He wanted to tell them about the pains in his stomach, but he couldn't, now that he had a mind to do it.

"I know my mother misses not seeing me more than she does," Lizz went on.

He was thinking maybe Lizz was more like her mother than the other two girls.

"My mother is a good woman, and I am. I'm a good daughter," Lizz said rather belligerently.

"Indeed you are, that you are, Elizabeth, me girl. There's no one to gainsay you there, no one at all."

Dennis burst out into a loud wail.

"Ah, he's hurt," Tom said.

"I'll see if he is," Lizz said, leaving the room.

Jim and Tom sat listening and waiting. In a moment Dennis was silenced and they heard Danny talking.

"I told him not to jump, Mama, I did. And he jumped and he jumped on his head."

"You were a good boy. 'd it's nothing serious."

"I jumped, too," Little Margaret said.

"But you didn't jump on your head," Danny said.

"I'll give all of you children a cookie," Lizz said.

"Jim," Old Tom said, bending forward, "Jim, would you be liking a glass or a can of beer?"

Jim looked toward the rear where Lizz was still with the children.

"Tom, I would." There was doubt on his face. "But I took the pledge."

"You don't say," Tom replied, as though Jim had said something of the utmost gravity.

"Yes, Lizz insisted and . . ."

"'Tis a pity," Old Tom said thoughtfully, "I was after

sittin' here thinkin', 'Now, wouldn't it be nice if me and Jim was just to wet our whistles?' 'Tis a pity." Old Tom sucked his lower lip. "Sure and havin' a drink of beer out of a can, now that isn't violatin' the pledge. The Lord will send no man to the fires of Hell for takin' a snifter of beer when he's after gettin' over an injury for workin' as hard as you do."

"I think you're right, Tom."

Tom was meditative again. Then he bent forward once more and lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper.

"Jim, you ask her if it will be all right."

Old Tom nodded his head in the direction of the rear of the house.

Jim's long, leathery face broke into a smile.

"We'll get a can, Tom," he said genially.

III

"It was just a little bump on the head," Lizz said, coming back to the front.

"It happens to all of 'em. Many's the time you and your brothers and sisters would bump yourself. Sure, once when you were a wee little one, I had you on the wagon and—"

"That wasn't the time, Tom, that your wagon got split in two by the train, was it, Tom?" Jim asked with a laugh.

"Glory be to God, it wasn't."

"I wouldn't be here if it was," Lizz said.

"You were a wee one, and you were sitting up there beside me as proud as Punch, with a ribbon your mother had tied in your hair. I had to stop the horses quick, and you came near to pitching off the wagon headfirst. I dropped the reins just like that and caught you just in the nick of time. Ah, that was a close shave, and it put such a fright into you, sure and Glory be to God, I didn't know how I would stop you from crying, and I took you into a store and bought you a penny's worth of candy."

They all laughed.

"Oh, I was as proud as a peacock when I could sit on the wagon with you, Father. I was as proud."

"And on a Sunday in good weather I'd put you all on the back of the wagon, and your mother beside me, and off we'd go for a drive."

"I remember. We'd all be sitting in the back of the wagon getting bounced and bumped," Lizz said, laughing again. "Mother would dress us all up, and she'd get dressed up too."

"Your mother, Elizabeth—she was a pretty one in her day. And she'd be holding your sister Louise in her arms, and she only a wee little one." Old Tom went on, regret and nostalgia in his voice.

"How is Louise, Tom?" Jim asked.

Old Tom made a wry, sad face, and for a few moments there was silence.

"I sent an offering to the Poor Clares only yesterday to have them pray for my sister."

"Peg is speaking of her going to Denver. Denver, Colorado."

"She's better off at home," Lizz said.

"Peg says she should be going to Denver. Denver, Colorado."

"What do you say, Tom?" Jim asked.

The question surprised Old Tom. Then he slowly began to shake his head from side to side.

"Ah, me poor Louise, me poor baby daughter," he sighed.

Jim was silent. He was a father, too. He had already come to know how a father can be torn with torment about his children. He remembered how hurt he had been when the twins had died after two days. That had been in 1902, before Danny was born. He heard the laughter of his three children out in the back. It was good to hear your own kids laugh. Their laughter was so innocent. Only when they grew up did they know the hardness, the sadness of life.

He gave Old Tom a sympathetic glance.

"Louise was always such a delicate child. Even as a baby she was delicate," Lizz said.

"I do be worryin' about her."

"She shouldn't work, Father . . . Father, don't let her work. She's too delicate."

Old Tom nodded agreement.

"Maybe she'll be all right, Tom," Jim said softly. He wanted to say more, much more, but what was there for him to say?

"I pray for her . . . I'll say more prayers . . . I'll send another offering to the Poor Clares."

Jim gave Lizz a sharp, angry look.

IV

Lizz was out in the kitchen now. Jim and Old Tom sat in silence.

Jim wanted to go out to the corner saloon with Old Tom, but Lizz might not like it. She might get angry and nag him. He didn't want to be nagged by her in front of the old man. He knew Old Tom, yes, he knew him well, and he liked him. He liked the old fellow best of all Lizz's relatives. And he knew that Old Tom wanted his beer. But he couldn't bring himself to make the break. It wasn't for fear of Lizz—no, it wasn't that at all. Could he break his pledge? How many pledges had he broken already since he and Lizz had gotten married? He felt like a fool, going with Lizz to the parish house, standing there, saying nothing while Lizz talked. He'd feel like a goddamned fool taking the pledge again.

He wasn't going out to get drunk, only to have a glass of beer sociably with the old fellow. And it would do Old Tom good. Old Tom didn't look too well himself. He had lost weight. He looked much too thin.

But there was no wrong in his having a glass of beer. No harm was in it.

Still, Jim hesitated. A few minutes ago, he'd gotten sore at Lizz because she'd said she'd send more money to the Poor

Clares, but he hadn't said anything. Still, he'd gotten sore. They couldn't afford to be giving much money to the church. He was too poor. And now he was home laid up with this hernia. No money was coming in, and their grocery bill was mounting. Had he a right to drink?

Every time he got drunk, he felt like a sonofabitch afterward. Still, he didn't do it often. Had he a right to drink at all?

But what did a poor man have a right to do in this world? He had to have some way of letting off steam, didn't he?

And he didn't intend to get drunk. All he wanted to do was to spend a nickel on a can of beer and drink it slowly and sociably here with the old man.

They sat there, still silent. Old Tom kept watching Jim and wondering was it that Jim was afraid of her tongue? That was something he well understood, even in the case of his own daughter.

But he was wanting that drink of beer, he was.

"We'll go now in a minute, Tom," Jim said.

"Any time, Jim, any time," Old Tom said.

They heard the sounds and voices of the children.

"You do it this way," Danny was explaining.

Jim stiffened up. Danny sounded just like Al O'Flaherty. Al was always telling people how to do things, as if he knew it all when there was one hell of a lot that he didn't know. Lizz's relations were making a little Al O'Flaherty out of his son.

It was two, three years ago—he didn't remember exactly. That night when he'd taken Danny back to the O'Flahertys'. He'd held Danny in his arms on the Wentworth Avenue streetcar and the little boy had screamed bloody murder during the entire ride. He wouldn't stop. And a woman on the streetcar had told him to stop beating the child. He could remember telling her:

-Lady, I haven't been beating him. I haven't laid a hand on him.

The boy had been left for two weeks with the old lady and had wanted to go back. That first night when Danny had been back home after those weeks, he'd come home from work and found Danny screaming. He wouldn't eat. Lizz had even tried to feed him at her breast. She was nursing the little girl then. And Danny had hit out at her in a rage. The boy's rage had even frightened him.

What had happened? What had they said to the little boy to have caused this?

Finally, Danny had cried himself to sleep. He'd gone to bed himself, thinking that Danny's tantrum was done, over with. How wrong he'd been. Danny's screams woke them up. Nothing would quiet him. The neighbors had heard.

In his own impotence he'd wanted to hit Danny, but Lizz would have none of that. And when Lizz had told him that he'd better take Danny back to her mother's, he'd dressed and gone without thinking much about it. God, he'd even been afraid that his son would scream himself to death.

Never in his whole life had he spent such a night. He knew that he had really let the boy go because he was poor. It had been one less mouth to feed, and, then, Lizz's relations had treated Danny well. But they were making a little dude of the boy, with his long curls and white stockings. And it bothered him, leaving him in the house with Lizz's sick sister, Louise.

It was too late now. He wanted to take the boy back home, but his own son was a stranger to him.

Old Tom was sitting and watching Jim. Ah, he knew there was something on the man's mind, indeed there was.

Old Tom made noises in his throat to attract Jim's attention.

With an old black shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, Lizz entered the room and said.

"Jim, I'm going to run over to church to say a rosary for my sister Louise."

Old Tom's face fell. Jim looked disappointed too.

"Tom and I thought we'd take a little walk. I'd like to see how it feels to be on the street again," Jim told her.

"I'll only be gone a minute," Lizz said. "I'll be back before you know it."

"All right," Jim said reluctantly.

"Jim, why don't you get a can of beer for Father? The Lord won't hold it against you."

"You don't think so, Lizz?"

"No, a little beer will be good for Father. Why don't you let Father walk to the corner and get a can?"

"I can do it."

"With that hernia, Jim—"

"Ah, sure, and it's nothin', nothin' atall for me to run down to the corner. Don't I often do it for Mary and meself? It'll be nothing atall," Old Tom said.

"Here, let me give you the money," Lizz said, digging into her apron pocket.

"Ah, Lizz me girl, 'tis nothin' atall, nothin' atall. Sure, I have the price of a can of beer meself. That much they do give me in me retirement."

Chapter Nine

I

JIM's left cheek was swollen with tobacco. He rose, walked a few feet to the bellied stove in the center of the room, and spat into it. He'd have to polish up the stove one of these days.

He sat down, chewing on his plug of tobacco and waiting for Old Tom to return with the can of beer. He smiled understandingly. He was certain he knew why Old Tom was taking so long. The old gent was having one at the bar.

The children were making noise in the back of the flat. He liked that. Damn it, he was proud to be the father of four kids. Only he hoped Lizz wouldn't get caught again.

Danny wandered into the front of the house. He halted apprehensively and stared uncertainly at his father.

Jim was struck with shyness at the stare of his five-year-old son. Danny just stood there. What did that look in the boy's eyes mean?

Danny turned to go back.

"Just a minute," Jim said.

Danny swung around and faced his father with fear in his blue eyes.

"Are you having a good time?" Jim asked.

"Yes, Papa," Danny answered very slowly.

"Your big brother Bill will be home from school before long, and you can play with him."

"Yes, Papa."

Jim struggled to control a slow, hot flow of feeling. "Are you having a good time?" he asked again.

Why didn't Danny talk to him the way Bill did, or the two little ones?

—I ought to bring him back here to his own home.

"You ought to come down here oftener and see us," Jim said.

"Yes . . . but I don't know how to come alone."

"We'll see to it that you do," Jim said.

The boy paled. Jim tightened with hurt.

"Can I go back and play, Papa?" Danny asked.

"Go ahead," Jim said curtly.

Danny turned and ran to the back again.

II

When Old Tom had returned with the can of beer, insisting that he had been delayed because the bartender had been busy, Jim had insisted that Old Tom take the first drink. Now Jim lifted the pail to his lips, took a long drink, and then, setting the pail on the floor beside him, wiped his lips and chin with the back of his hand.

Jim nodded his head, expressing satisfaction with the beer.

There was a twinkle in Old Tom's eyes, and his weather-beaten old face softened up.

Neither he nor Jim spoke for awhile.

Old Tom thought that Jim would have been a good son. Many's the time these last couple of years when he wished he could look on Jim as his own. Ah, yes, a fine man, a fine strapping man, and his own kind, with no style to him and none of your airs and fancy ways and fancy clothes and eating like a gentleman for you, with your knife this way and that way on your plate and your fork that way and this way, and drinking your beer out of a glass and not out of a can like a gentleman, no less! He didn't want to say or think a word against his son Al, and he was proud of him, him with little education, going to work in the shoe store when he was no more than a slip of a boy and getting himself the grand job he had now, traveling on trains and staying in fine hotels fit

for a king or a lord, and wearing the fine gentleman's clothes that he did, and taking care of them all. No, he didn't want to be saying a word or thinking a word against his son Al, but Al was different. Al had always been different, a boy that was going to be somebody in this world, and he was proud of his son Al, and of his Ned, too, up there in Madison, Wisconsin, but Al and Ned, they were not his own kind the way his son-in-law Jim was.

Old Tom started to get out of his chair to fetch the pail. Jim noticed. He bent down, picked up the pail, and with his long arms handed it over to Old Tom.

"Me whistle's in fresh need of a wettin', Jim," Old Tom said.

Holding the pail in both hands, he took a good drink, sighed, and handed the pail back to Jim.

The laughter of the children came from the rear. Jim looked up for a moment and then picked up the can of beer and had another drink. He passed the can to Old Tom.

"There are times, Jim, when there's nothin' at all as good for a man as a drink of beer," Old Tom said, taking another drink.

"As long as you don't take too many of 'em, Tom," Jim said.

"That's the truth, too, the truth it is."

Jim was thinking that he didn't want to drink too much beer. He wouldn't, he assured himself. But the few swigs that he had taken already had given him the thirst for it, and he wanted more. He feared what would happen. He could just keep at it until it would affect him, and he'd be drunk. And he didn't want to get drunk today.

But he'd been feeling rotten and restless, griping with himself because he had to be home another day. Old Tom's coming had been a welcome surprise!

The old fellow had his eyes on the can.

"Well," Jim exclaimed.

A knowing expression came into Old Tom's eyes.

Jim grinned, picked up the can, drank, and again passed it over to Old Tom.

III

Jim was uneasy. They'd almost finished the can now, and he was debating with himself about getting another. Old Tom would want more. The old fellow liked his beer; that was one of the reasons why he liked the old fellow. He could drink more than two cans of beer without it affecting him. In fact, it would only be one pint, because the old fellow was drinking half of it.

The kids must be having a hell of a good time out there, judging from the noise they were making. Well, he liked that. He wanted his kids to have better childhoods than he had.

His own mother?

What had she been like?

Looking around the disorderly parlor with the old familiar stove in the center, the kerosene lamp on the table, the scratched old chairs, the small and shabby rug in the center of the floor, he suddenly knew that he had never been sadder than he was right now. His eyes fell on the empty pail. He picked it up. Then his gaze met the wistful eyes of Old Tom.

"I guess we could have another can, Tom?"

Tom's face lit up.

"That we could. That we could, Jim. I'll run down and I'll be back with it in two shakes of a lamb's tail," Old Tom said.

"I'll get it this time."

"But, man, with that ailment of yours, walkin' . . ."

"Tom, it takes more than a goddamned hernia to put me on the list of cripples."

As Jim rose, Tom gazed at him with respect.

Yes, indeed, what a big, strong, strapping man his son-in-law was!

IV

Stepping out of the house, Jim thought how good it was just to be outside again. He looked up and down the block of poor, shabby houses. He gazed across the street at the Morgan and Hearst packing plant. It ran the length of the block and the loading platform faced on 11 Salle Street. Wagons were backed against the platform. Horses stood patiently, some stamping their feet, others waving their tails to flick off flies. The noise and bustle of work, the loading and unloading wagons, the men bustling about on the platform . . . this was his world.

A train shooting by on the Rock Island tracks behind Morgan and Hearst. The noise of its engine and its wheels. Black smoke pluming up the sky. Yes, all of this was part of the world of work—his world. And, damn it, where would America be without this world of work and without workmen like himself?

Mrs. Schorheart down by Twenty-fifth Street, standing with her big fat arms folded, looking at nothing. All the kids on the streets. Yes siree, it was good, damned good just to get out again.

Jim turned south. As he took a step on the narrow sidewalk he felt a twinge of pain in his groin. He cursed. He walked with a slight limp, swinging the pail in his right hand. This hernia wasn't anything, but it still hurt. Maybe he couldn't go to work tomorrow. He cursed again. There was a limit to a man's strength, and there was no use in a man kidding himself as if there weren't.

He envied the men on the bustling platform across the street. They were able to work and he wasn't. And a man didn't like hard work and grumped about it and wanted his day of hard work to end, and still he knew that he liked it when he didn't like it because it took your mind off trouble, and you could have fits of work and you didn't have time to think about any of the things that worried you. But sitting

THE FACE OF TIME

home in your own place, not able to go out and walk around only got you all balled up in your own worries, and once that happened you knew that there were more things you could worry about. Yes, there were more things on Heaven and earth, Horatio, and more worries.

How he wished that he were on his wagon today.

Reaching the corner of Twenty-fifth and La Salle, Jim brushed through the swinging doors of the saloon.

V

Old Tom sat with an almost Buddha-like quietness.

If he could fall asleep now until Jim came back he wouldn't be knowing what the children were doing, and if he wouldn't be knowing it, then Jim couldn't hold it against him or ask him why he'd let them do whatever it was they were doing.

God in Heaven, they were making a racket. It sounded like springs were breaking. But if he should go and see what was up with them and what they were doing, why, he would have to be telling them to stop doing whatever it was they were doing, and, ah, he didn't want to be spoiling their fun.

He blinked his eyes and yawned. He told himself that he was sleepy, but he knew that he really wasn't sleepy at all. He was wanting Jim to get back with the can of beer so he could wet that old whistle of his, and so that Jim could be taking the children in hand if it was so that they had to be taken in hand. In his day he had known how to take his own in hand, and time and again he hadn't even spared the strap, and when Mary had been at him with that tongue of hers going as only the tongue of Mary could be going, he had been known to lose his temper with the children and to get out his razor strop. But now he was an old man and these were his grandchildren and not his own, and when you became an old man with the sure knowledge that soon you would be going out to Calvary Cemetery for your bones to rot, then, ah, the noise and commotion of the world didn't matter, it didn't matter tuppence.

Old Tom wished Jim would be coming back. A man of his age shouldn't have to be looking after three grandchildren when they were, for all he knew, up to diviltry of all kinds and acting as if they would be tearing the house down. He tried to make himself doze off, letting his head sink, his chin resting against his chest, and closing his eyes. He let out a snore as though to convince himself that he was asleep.

The noise they were making. Why couldn't they be quiet and play more quiet?

He got up and walked to the rear of the flat.

The three children were in Jim's and Lizz's bedroom. They had two chairs set beside the bed and they were jumping and diving off the chairs onto the bed, laughing and squealing each time, rolling on the bed and on each other.

Ah, there was no harm in it, what they were doing, even if they were making a confounded noise. But what would Jim say of it when he came back? Jim could be a strict man.

"What in the name are the three of you up to?" he asked, trying to make his voice gruff and authoritative.

The three children, paying no heed to him, rolled on the bed, giggling and laughing.

"Do ye hear me?"

Danny got up and stepped from the bed onto one of the rickety chairs beside it.

"Young man, do you hear me talkin' to you?" Old Tom asked him, still trying to sound gruff.

Danny turned innocent eyes to his grandfather.

"Oh, Father, watch me dive. I'm a diver. This is the ocean."

"So you're a diver, are you, and what about the springs of the mattress?"

Danny launched out horizontally and plumped heavily on the bed, letting out a laugh as he landed.

Little Margaret got on a chair and put her hands out before her, imitating what Danny had done.

Old Tom put a restraining hand on her shoulder.

"And, you, little miss, what is it you're up to?"

"Diving."

"She's a diver, too, Father," Danny said, rolling over onto his back.

"Well, the three of you listen to me," Old Tom said.

"We're jumping in the ocean," Danny said.

"When you jump again in the ocean, jump easy, easy so as you don't break the springs in your father's and mother's bed."

Old Tom turned and left the room, and the children laughed as they kept right on bouncing.

VI

"Yes, Tom, my father was an overseer in New Orleans before the Civil War," Jim explained, setting the can of beer down between them.

"You don't say?" Old Tom responded with interest.

Old Tom had heard this before, but he was reacting as though it were all new to him. He liked talk like this, with a man over a can of beer.

"Your father was a Tipperary man you say, Jim?"

"Yes, Tom, he was a Tipperary man. His brothers and sisters went to New York City, but he went to New Orleans."

"You don't say. And he was an overseer. Why, in the old country that was like being a gentleman."

"No—no it wasn't. My old man was no gentleman." Jim laughed with singular bitterness. "An overseer was a slave driver. He drove the nigger slaves, and from everything I know of him, he was a man who could drive. He never believed in sparing the rod and spoiling the child."

"He was a big man, Jim, the likes of yourself?"

"Oh, Tom, I guess I'm half an inch to an inch taller than he was," Jim said proudly. "But, yes, he was a big man." Jim paused and for a moment he was far away from Tom and La Salle Street. "He was a big, fighting man."

"You don't say."

"He joined a regiment of Irish, I guess they were, called

the Louisiana Tigers, and fought in the Civil War in the Confederate Army."

"Ah, a soldier, too. One of the Grays, not the Blues. It's good he wasn't killed in the fighting. Me brother in New York ran out to Australia because they had the draft. They were taking men for the fighting. Sure and I ne sooner set foot on the land of America meself, Jim, than all I heard tell of was the War and the fighting, and, sure, it was beyond me comprehension—brother against brother, the Blues and the Grays."

"My mother was born in Kentucky," Jim said, his voice tender.

"You don't say? Kentucky. Where's Kentucky, Jim?"

"It's between the North and South. A border state, it was called in those days. It stayed with the Union. Abraham Lincoln came from Kentucky."

"Well, now, what do you think of that? Abraham Lincoln, why he was as fine a man, Jim, as ever walked the face of the earth. Why, there never was even a priest finer than Abraham Lincoln. Well do I remember the day the poor man was shot, sad day it was, and Abraham Lincoln a man of the people, murdered."

"Lincoln was a great man, Toin. I say that even though my own father fought against him in the Civil War. But have another drink, Tom. Beer settling in a can will only get stale."

Their eyes met in knowing glances. They drank.

"I've always wondered what my mother was like," Jim went on softly.

"She must have been a saint, Jim, a saint."

"Yes, Tom, she was a good woman. It doesn't do me ~~any~~ good to wish she had lived but . . ."

Jim stopped and looked far off, his rough, leathery face ~~had~~ sad.

"God must have willed it, Jim."

"When I was a boy I was always wishing she would come back. When I was in the orphan asylum I used to wish she would come back and get me, take me away. A boy needs

home, Tom, and she died when I was only one month old." Jim's voice almost broke. "I think it was because of my birth."

"Yes, 'tis so, Jim, 'tis so, life is no bed of roses."

"I hated my stepmother. She was no good."

"There's that kind, Jim, and there's the other kind," Old Tom philosophized.

"What's that you were saying, Tom?"

"I was after sayin', Jim, there's the kind like your mother, and there's the kind like your stepmother. Me own mother, may God have mercy on her soul, and may He have mercy, Jim, on your own mother's soul, me own mother was the kind your mother was."

Jim drank and handed the pail to his father-in-law.

"I want it better for my own kids than it was for me. Well, thank God, they have their mother."

"She's a good girl, Lizz is. She takes a little after her own mother—I mean in praying. Mary is a one for praying, too. Tell me, Jim, was your own mother a one for praying?"

"I don't know. I don't even have a picture of her. I saw one before I ran away, and she was a pretty woman with fine, dark hair like Lizz's."

"And when you was in with the orphans, the ah . . ."

"The asylum."

"Yes, the asylum, you was raised the way the boys is raised by Sister Dolorosa, me wife's sister, wasn't you, Jim?"

"No, they beat the living hell out of us, and I would tell myself, Tom, I'd tell myself that when I became a man, no man would beat me. And I haven't been beaten up yet. Remember when we were on strike in 1904? Well, I thought of that when I beat up scabs."

"And did your father see you in the orphan . . .?"

Jim shook his head.

"She turned his head."

"Did she marry him for his money, Jim?"

"Money! He didn't have a pot . . . he, had no money, Tom."

"But those slaves?"

"He didn't own them."

"He got nary a cent out of them?"

"He only got his wages, and he drank those as fast as he earned them. He married my stepmother and came to Chicago. After the War, he had a job cleaning out sewers and after that he drove a team of horses. I just lit out. I wouldn't stay in the same house with that woman. I couldn't stand her in my mother's place."

The resentments of his boyhood came flaming back. He stopped talking. He liked and trusted Old Tom, but he had hit on things that he didn't ever talk about—not even to Lizz in those first courting days. His stepmother had been a tall woman, with a big nose and a full, round face. He couldn't remember her clearly, and, goddamn it, he didn't want to. She was dead now. His father was dead. After his father had died, she'd come and taken him out of the asylum. And he had run away again. He could remember her nagging his father until the old man would hang one on her, and then she'd scream and cry.

Once, when his father had hit her, he'd been glad. She'd had it coming. The times she had driven his father to hit him and beat him. But he'd gotten hardened to it. It had only made him angry; it had only made him want to grow up and be a man all the more.

He wished his father had lived to know what kind of a man he'd become, to see him in some of his fights.

From the moment she'd set eyes on him, she'd had no use for him. Their eyes had met and they had looked at each other as enemies. Maybe he had some of those whippings and beatings and strappings coming to him. A kid, a boy, had to be controlled. And he'd been a wild one. Goddamn it, if any of his kids ever became as wild as he'd been they'd have him to reckon with. They were going to grow up different from the way he grew up.

But they had a mother. Except Danny. Lizz's relatio-

teaching him to call his grandmother 'Mother' and Old Tom here, 'Father.'

"Yes," Old Tom said, sighing deeply. "Yes, 'tis a pity."

"What's that you said, Tom?" Jim asked.

"I was after saying, Jim, 'tis a pity."

"What is, Tom?"

"Life."

Old Tom picked up the can of beer once more.
be. The kids had been rather quiet and, drinking beer with
Old Tom, Jim hadn't thought of them. Now they were
sighing and shouting. They were making a goddamned
with racket. They must be up to something.

He went to the back, and as he looked into the bedroom, Danny triumphantly landed on the bed.

"What the hell are you doing?" Jim screamed.

The children froze at the sound of his voice.

Danny looked up at his father from the bed, terrified.

"We were playing diving in the ocean, Papa," he finally said.

"You'll break the hull bed. Do you do that at your grandmother's?"

"Huh?"

"Didn't you hear me?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Well, answer me!"

"Yes, Papa."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, I do dive in the bed at Mother's."

Mother's! Jim's face flushed, his anger mounted. Mother's! Lizz was his mother, not that old Irish biddy.

Jim took one step forward and raised his hand as if to smack Danny.

The boy drew back, pressed his lips together, clenched his small fists. He wouldn't cry out. He wouldn't. The color drained from his face in the dim, stuffy bedroom as he waited,

stiffened in terror for the blow. Jim let his hand drop to his side.

"Listen, you kids, play some other game and don't tear up the bed and ruin them bedsprings. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Papa," Danny said.

"Yes, Papa."

"Yes, Papa."

Jim turned and limped back to the front of the flat.

"I made them quiet down a bit, Tom, and stop wrecking the bed," Jim said, handing the pail to Tom.

Old Tom drank.

"Lizz should be gettin' back any minute now," Jim said, nervously looking about the room.

"Maybe when Lizz returns, you and me might get a little breath of fresh air?" Old Tom suggested.

"Yes, I'd like to, Tom," Jim said.

Old Tom thought how Jim and himself were men who understood each other. He handed the beer can to Jim.

VII

Danny was glad that Mama had come back and Papa and Father had gone out. He wasn't afraid of Mama. Mama had gotten mad when Papa said he was going out with Father. But Papa said he was going.

"Why, Daniel, what do you want?" Mama said, noticing that Danny was standing at the entrance to the kitchen and eyeing her intently.

"Hey, Dan, come on!" Bill commanded.

"Just a minute," Danny called.

"What did you say, my son?"

"Mama, can I have some condensed milk?"

"Of course you can. Here, here's a spoon."

Danny grabbed the spoon from her hand and went to the table. He began to eat spoonfuls of thick Borden's Condensed Milk from the opened can.

"Come on, Dan!" Bill called again.

Danny didn't answer. He went on eating the condensed milk.

VIII

Since Bill had come from school, he had beaten him at a game called lagging pennies. Bill had beaten him at wrestling and put him down and made him say "Down." He liked Bill. Bill was his big brother. When he was bigger, maybe he would beat Bill.

"What'll we play?" Danny asked.

"I don't know. You're a little kid. It's no fun playing with a little kid."

Danny's face fell.

"Let's play hide-and-seek."

"No."

"Please, Bill."

"There's no place to hide."

"You can hide in the bedroom," Danny said.

"It's too easy to find anyone in the bedroom."

"Let's play with toys."

"Only a kid has toys. Toys are for little kids."

"Don't you have toys, Bill?"

"Only a kid has toys. I'm nine. I'm not a little kid like you."

Lizz appeared at the entrance between the kitchen and the dining room.

"What are you little shysters doing?"

"Oh, nothin', Mama."

"I guess I'd better be lighting the lamps. It's getting dark."

The room was dim. Danny hadn't noticed it; he'd been happy playing with Bill. Outside, through the window, he could see it was getting dark.

And Father wasn't back. He wanted to go home now.

"Come on, I'll show you how to make paper boats, Dan," Bill said.

Danny didn't answer. He was afraid. It was dark and Father hadn't come back. He wanted to go home.

Carrying a box of safety matches, Lizz came into the dining room and lit the kerosene lamp on the table.

"Your father should be coming home."

There was light in the room, but it wasn't like the light at home from the gas or the electric light.

"We'll make fleets of paper boats and have a sea fight."

He wanted Father to come back and take him home.

"We'll have a sea fight. I'll be Dewey and you'll be the Spaniards and we'll have a sea war, Dan."

"Where's Father?" Danny asked, on the verge of tears.

"Oh . . . Ma says he's out with Pa. I bet I know where they are. They're in the saloon at the corner."

"Go get 'em," Danny said, struggling not to cry.

"Say, who died and made you boss? Go get 'em yourself. Say, what's the matter with you?"

Danny suddenly sobbed.

"I want . . . Father," he wailed through his tears.

"Oh, don't be a cry baby," Bill told him.

Hearing him crying and sobbing, Little Margaret and Dennis ran in from the parlor and stared at him. They enjoyed watching him cry.

Danny shook with tears. His shoulders heaved. He was alone. Father was gone. He would never go back home to Mother. He was afraid, and he couldn't stop the tears from rolling down his cheeks. He was in a rage of fear, and they didn't care.

"Goodness me, what's the matter?" Lizz asked calmly, coming into the room again.

"He's crying. I didn't do nothin' to him, Ma. I didn't hit him."

Dennis laughed joyfully and clapped his hands in a gesture of happiness.

"Danny boy, tell your mother—what's the matter?" Lizz asked gently.

He couldn't tell her. He could only cry in fear. The tears

rolled down his cheeks and he felt dark inside. He couldn't talk.

"He wants Father," Bill said.

"Oh, your grandfather will be back, Danny boy, never fear—and no harm will come to you."

"When?" Danny suddenly asked, ceasing to cry and staring directly up at his mother.

"He'll be back," Lizz said.

"I want to go home—to Mother," he said challengingly.

Danny threw the words at her like darts. She felt suddenly dizzy, and for a second she wasn't sure but what she would faint. This little boy in front of her was her own son, her flesh and blood, just as she was flesh and blood of her own mother, and she had lost him.

Danny's eyes were on her, searchingly and suspiciously.

As she opened her arms to hold him to her, his face lit up, his eyes shone, and his whole body relaxed. She could hear footsteps on the stairs of the hallway.

"Here comes my Papa," Little Margaret exclaimed happily.

IX

Jim burst into the room, and Old Tom, weaving slightly with his face solemn and dignified, followed. Old Tom stood near the dining-room entrance, his features unchanging, his eyes watery and impenetrable.

"How's everybody?" Jim asked in a loud, boisterous voice; his broad shoulders swayed from side to side.

"Jim O'Neill, you broke your pledge," Lizz barked in anger.

"Drunk—I'm not drunk," Jim growled.

"I'll go home to my mother," Lizz said melodramatically.

Ignoring her, Jim took an uneven step forward. He took his children in with a glance. His eyes rested on Danny.

"Come here!" he said.

Danny took a short, frightened step toward his father.

Jim moved forward and grabbed him. He had an overwhelming desire to kiss the cheeks of his son.

"Dan, you and Bill and you kids, you do any damned thing you want to in this house. Any damned thing you want to in the hull house."

Danny didn't want his father holding him. And Papa's breath smelled of beer. He didn't like to smell beer.

Jim let Danny go. He stood up, and again his big, broad shoulders swayed. He looked about the shabby little room, dim in the light from the kerosene lamp. He wanted to show the love within him, show it in some way, right now, in this room.

He turned to his father-in-law. Tom still stood by the entrance, still dignified.

"Sit down, Tom, and let's talk."

Old Tom hiccupped. The taste of beer was in his mouth. His stomach was heavy with beer. It made noises. He wanted to get home.

"Tell me, Tom, was the beer in the old country as good as it is here?" Jim said.

"Ah, we have good beer in the old country," Tom said. He wanted to get home to Mary.

Chapter Ten

I

MARGARET sat at the dining-room table reading the newspaper. Mary O'Flaherty rocked on a chair by the window as she darned a pair of Danny's black stockings.

"Ah, your poor father," she murmured.

A look of worry crossed Margaret's face. She looked up from the newspaper. "What do you think is wrong with Father, Mother?"

"The poor man's getting old."

"But Mother, Father isn't older than you, is he?"

Mary O'Flaherty evaded the question. "My heart bleeds for the poor man," she said. "He's not himself any more. Poor Pa, he's not the man he used to be. When he and me grandson came home tonight, the two of them, they were all done in. You should have seen them."

"Maybe they had a good time and were tired."

"That they were."

Resentfully Margaret told herself that whenever there was trouble in the family she always got the brunt of it. Now it was her poor father. Maybe she wouldn't be able to take that vacation trip to New York she'd been planning after all. She'd saved her money, and Lorry Robinson had given her a hundred dollars for it. She deserved it. But now, with her poor father a sick man, and with Louise sick too, she knew she wouldn't be able to go.

"Does he say anything, Mother?"

"It isn't what he says, Peg—it's the way he is. When he went to bed tonight the life wasn't in him. I tell you, the life just wasn't in him. Day after day, the poor man—he's tired. The

life doesn't seem to be in him. When he came home tonight, Peg, it made me heart bleed. There I was, givin' him hell . . ."

"But, Mother, what did Father ever do for you to quarrel with him?"

"I don't give him hell because of whæ he does. He's always been a good man. I give him hell because that's the way y^r d have to treat a man. If me daughter Lizz would be'learnt hⁱt me and if she would give her tinker hell, ah, she'd be batted off. So I see the poor man is sick, and it's no time to be givin' him hell, for sure I didn't mean a word I said. So I made a cup of tea. That's all he would take, and then he went to bed. But I'm tellin' you, Peg, poor Pa isn't himself."

"Mother, did he drink with Jim?"

"Indeed he did. The two of them histed off to a saloon."

"Maybe he just had too much. You shouldn't begrudge him, that."

"He wasn't drunk, Peg. Peg, the poor man, poor Pa, I tell you, poor Pa isn't himself. He said to me, 'Mary, k'm ailin',' so I gave him a cup of tea and told him to get some rest."

"He'll be all right in the morning," Margaree said, denying a sense of alarm that was strong within her.

"Some days poor Pa sleeps half the day."

"Let him, Mother, if he's tired."

"Indeed I do. I go in on tiptoe and look at him, and my heart bleeds—he looks old, and, sure, he looks so tired. And if he is awake, I do say to him, 'Tom, can I get you a cup of tea?' And he does sometimes say to me, 'No, Mary—no, I just think I'll take a wee nip of a nap.' Yes, the poor man lies down, and some days, I swear it's the God's truth, he sleeps half the day."

Neither she nor her mother spoke for awhile.

"And Louise—Peg, she was alvays delicate. Two nights ago, she coughed half the night. There she was, all night, wracked with the cough. Me heart bled for her, too, the beautiful young girl, killing herself with her new job and her type-writing on that machine." Mrs. O'Flaherty leaned forward.

She spoke in a gossipy, almost conspiratorial way. "Peg, who is the man she's out gallivantin' with tonight?"

"Ed Richards. He's a nice fellow. He's rich, too, Mother, and I think he's interested in Louise."

"Is he a married man?"

"No, Mother."

"And is he a black Protestant?"

"I think he's a Catholic, Mother."

"Does he go to Mass on Sunday?"

"I don't know. Why don't you ask Louise?"

"Don't worry. Never fear, I'll ask her. Never fear. With her delicate health, she shouldn't be out at night."

"Maybe it will do her good. She's a young girl, Mother, she's only nineteen."

Mary O'Flaherty said nothing. She went on darning Danny's stockings.

—Ah, she thought, me family isn't as hard as me.

II

Everyone was asleep when Louise came home from her date with Ed Richards. It was eleven-fifteen, but she imagined it was much later. And she couldn't escape the feeling that it was bad to be out late with a man.

She walked on tiptoe into her bedroom and stood there in the darkness. A sob escaped her. She bit her lip.

Ed Richards was tall and handsome and good and kind. His hands. He hadn't known it, but all evening she had been looking at them. With hands like that, he could be soft and tender, and she so wanted him to stroke and pet her. She wanted to close her eyes and feel his fingers on her eyelids. Another muffled sob escaped her.

She began to unhook her now blue dress. She took it off and laid it across the chair in the corner. She stepped out of her petticoat and took off her corsets. She sat down and slowly peeled off her black silk stockings. She caressed her long, lean legs. She could still hear Ed telling her that she was beautiful.

She stifled a sob. She had been blue all evening. He must have been disappointed in her. And she couldn't tell him about her illness. It was a secret shame she carried. She stood naked in the darkness.

Oh, she wanted love, and happiness—and life!

Louise got her nightgown from the closet, put it on, and crawled in the big bed beside Margaret. She struggled with herself not to cry. She wanted to cry. No, it wasn't that she wanted to cry, but the tears were in her body. They were in her heart. Her heart, her body, all of her was full of tears.

She wanted to live her own life. But what kind of life? She didn't want to be like Peg. Sometimes she did, she wished it, wished that she could. But she couldn't. She was different. She couldn't smoke cigarettes and drink and get drunk and go with a married man like Mr. Robinson.

She gazed at the dark ceiling and wondered what it would be like. What would it be like with Ed Richards? He had been so sweet tonight.

Louise became warm all over, excited, nervous, and afraid. She turned to the wall.

Maybe she was bad. What was badness? Peg was supposed to be bad, but Peg didn't seem like a bad girl to her.

A racking cough tore up out of her chest. She sat up, bent over in anguish. The coughs tore their way up and rasped out of her throat. Her eyes filled with tears.

Oh, oh, maybe she was going to die, maybe this was it.

Her violent coughing awakened Margaret.

"What's the matter, Louise?" she asked in fright.

Louise was weak and wet with perspiration. She broke out in sobs.

"What's the matter, Louise, dear?"

She got up and turned on the light and sat on the edge of the bed.

Louise sobbed softly.

"Come, now, don't cry, Louise dearest . . . Did Ed Richards do something to you?" Margaret asked softly.

"No, no, not that."

"Are you blue? Tell me, Louise. You can tell me. You know I won't breathe a word of it to a living soul. I've seen life, Louise, and I'll understand. I know life."

"Oh, Peg!" Louise said. Her voice was flat, and she looked like an unhappy little girl. "Peg, it's just—oh, I'm sick, Peg, I'm sick."

"Darling, darling, you'll get better. Every day you're looking better."

To Margaret, her beautiful face was paler now in the glare of the electric light. Her heavy hair, tumbling down her back over her slight shoulders, seemed to exaggerate the thinness of her body and make her neck look longer. Only her upright young breasts, the nipples pressed against the silk of her blue nightgown, seemed almost too full because the rest of her was so frail.

Louise gazed at Peg. She wished she could believe her. Then she slowly shook her head from side to side.

"Darling, you go back to sleep now and don't you worry."

"I can't sleep. The coughing keeps me awake. I . . . Peg, I had the most awful fit of coughing."

"Did any . . ."

Peg stopped short.

"No, Peg, there was no blood," Louise said quickly.

"I wasn't thinking that, Louise darling," Margaret told her.

But Margaret knew that was what she had been thinking of. The fear of death clutched at her. Only she in the family was strong. She was alone. And on her poor shoulders there was to fall the burden of responsibility for her sick family.

And she carry it? She was only a woman, only a girl. Oh, she were a man! But she had to carry the burdens of a man. Oh, her poor father, poor Louise! Oh, her own poor life.

"Now, Louise darling, you get yourself a good night's sleep. You sleep and you'll feel better in the morning. You rest."

Louise nodded her head meekly. She lay down and turned

her face to the wall. She was so tired now. The tiredness was in all of her, all over her. It was in her eyes and her arms and her shoulders and her legs, and in her head and her mind. It was in all of her, and if only she didn't cough any more, if only God would help her and not let her or make her cough, she would sleep. She would sleep, and she would dream. She wanted to sleep. She wanted the tiredness in her to cover and go through every part of her so that she would be tiredness all over her and in her and she would sleep and have beautiful dreams, the way she sometimes used to sleep when she was a little girl.

III

Denver!

The word came to her just like that. Louise ought to be sent to Denver. The mountain air might cure her. No, nothing could cure Louise. She knew this in her bones. And her dear father, was he really sick, was there something wrong with him, her poor dear father? She was his favorite child, and he loved her more than he did poor Louise. Beside her here poor Louise was sleeping now, sleeping like a child. Yes, and her father loved her more than he loved Lizz.

Louise could sleep now, but she couldn't. She had to lie awake and worry.

—Denver.

Louise had to go to Denver, and she would beg, borrow, or steal the money to send her. Yes, it would be another burden on her. If Father got sick, it would fall on her, her poor shoulders. But she would bear it. She would bear every burden just as well as any man could.

And Ned. Her brother Ned, in Madison. You couldn't expect any help from him. At the first chance he had lit out and gotten married, not caring. Al did all he could, but he couldn't do any more, and Al didn't know how much she did to keep their family together.

Didn't Ned ever think that she might want to get married,

that she might want a life of her own? Didn't Al? Did they think of her or care?

Margaret wanted to cry for herself, to cry out so that the pity that was in her heart would drop right out of it. Could she—
—and she was a girl, a young girl—could a young girl carry in her all the pity and the sorrow that was in her heart?

Oh, she wanted to cry out her poor, poor heart, right now. But she wouldn't; she would be brave.

Father used to tell her when she was growing up:

—Peg, you're brave. It's brave you are.

And she was going to be brave now—brave about everything in her life.

Chapter Eleven

I

ARE you all right, Louise?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, coming into the parlor.

"Oh, yes, Mother, I'm all right. How are you? You've done a lot of work in the house today."

"How am I? I'm always the same. Sure, if it isn't one thing it's another. Now I'm giving meself a wee bit of rest before I begin to cook supper for me son and me little grandson," Mary O'Flaherty said, sitting down.

"I'll cook supper, Mother, and you take a rest."

"Ah, it's nothin' at all—you should have been born to see the day I worked as hard as me mother before me. And glory be to God, if me mother set eyes on an ice box, why her poor old eyes would have come out of her head, I swear they would. They would have popped right out of her head. Or if she was to see me living in a house where I pull a chain and there is an electric light making the night like the day. And the radiator, and you turn it and the whole house is warm. Me mother should have lived to see this day. Ah, you and your sister don't know what real work is, indeed you don't."

Louise looked hard at her mother. What had she looked like without those lines under her eyes? For a moment the lines seemed to be gone, but Mary O'Flaherty looked the same. It was impossible for Louise to imagine her as ever having been a girl.

"And automobiles and electrics, oh, I was thinkin' of all the things in this world that me mother never set eyes on."

"Mother, what were you like when you were a girl?"

"I was the same as I am now," Mary O'Flaherty answered.

Mary O'Flaherty's angular face softened. She looked as if she were remembering her girlhood and wishing that she could live it over again. Noticing her eyes, Louise thought how sad it must be to grow old. But most of the time her mother didn't seem unhappy. Only now and then Mother seemed sad, like now. Father seemed to be a sadder person than Mother. How hard it was to think of your own parents as being people, like other people.

Who did she take after? Father or Mother? She guessed she took after her father more than she did her mother.

"When I was your age, we didn't have the things girls have nowadays, paint and powder and all the clothes and corsets and hats. And we didn't make free, indeed we didn't."

"What did you do, Mother?"

"Ah, I danced a jig or two in me day," Mary O'Flaherty answered.

Louise thought that her mother must have had lots of spirit as a girl—more spirit than she herself had. But she used to have lots of spirit herself. A few years ago, almost everyone she knew talked of how much fun she was.

"Did you like to dance, Mother?"

What was Ireland like? What did her father and mother look like and what did they do in Ireland when they were courting?

She imagined a green country field, a road, the two of them walking hand in hand. Had her mother ever dreamed as she had just been dreaming? Had her mother ever sat and dreamed of being kissed and held in the moonlight?

"Sure we had good times. Good times. And your father could dance a jig, too."

"I'll bet the other girls liked him too, Mother."

"If they as much as looked at him, I'd have ripped their eyes right out of their heads."

"I'll bet Father was nice when he was young."

Mary O'Flaherty didn't answer. Suddenly she seemed far

away from the parlor on Indiana Avenue in Chicago. Her eyes still had a soft look in them.

"Me mother, God have mercy on her soul, she liked your father," Mary O'Flaherty said quietly. "I married your father in Brooklyn, New York. Brooklyn, New York."

—Will I ever get married? Louise asked herself.

"Coming over here to America on the boat," Mary O'Flaherty went on, "the waves came over the deck and, sure they could knock you down."

"Weren't you afraid, Mother?"

Mary O'Flaherty sat upright. The soft look vanished from her face.

"And, sure, what should I be afraid of?"

"Of the ship sinking in the storm, Mother."

"Me sister was with me," Mary said. "Your father came out ahead of me. Sure and I don't know what me and me sister would have done if he hadn't been waiting for us. Never in me life had I seen anything the likes of New York."

"Were you afraid, Mother?" Louise repeated, thinking of how she was afraid about going to Denver alone.

"Afraid—I've never been afraid in me livelong life. Afraid! And what was I to be afraid of? I didn't know where I was, except that I was in America, and there was Pa, and after we got through the customs at Ellis Island, your father took us to a rooming house in Brooklyn."

She was trying to imagine her parents meeting at the dock in New York these many years ago, years and years ago, before she had been born. She imagined her father standing at a dock—but would it have been that way? And she wanted to ask her mother if she had flung herself into Father's arms and kissed him, and if it had been the way lovers kissed.

Her father had been young then and not gray. And they had lived together all these years. Oh, she wished people didn't have to grow old and die. It wasn't right that this should happen. But it was God's will. It was life.

"Well, I can't be sittin' here. I have to be gettin' on with

me work," Mary O'Flaherty said abruptly. She left the parlor.

Louise rocked and thought.

No, she couldn't imagine her mother and father as young lovers. She couldn't imagine her mother as ever having been like Peg or herself. Peg would be getting home from work soon now. These last few days Peg had been so sweet to her. She loved her sister and was glad Peg was really going to take a week's vacation trip to New York. How she would love to travel! But, no, she shouldn't . . .

Louise began to sing love songs to herself.

II

Margaret turned the key in the lock of the front door. Here she was, back home. This home, with its sickness, its fighting, its troubles. And it had been the same as far back as she could remember.

"That you, Peg?" her mother called.

"Yes, it's me," Margaret answered. "Any phone calls?"

There was no reply.

Why couldn't she just stay in New York? Why couldn't a girl of her ability get a job in one of the big hotels there? Then she could live her own life.

Lorry Robinson could get his divorce and take her away from this forever! She saw herself the mistress of his house, and, oh, she would make him so happy and comfortable. And she would dress up, and they would go out to dinner at the finest restaurants and hotels, and he would be proud of her. When she went out with him, she wouldn't wear her glasses. Her poor eyes. A wave of anger against her mother swept through her.

"How are you, Peg?", Mary O'Flaherty asked, stopping at the entrance to the bedroom.

"Oh, Mother, I have a headache."

"Have a cup of tea and take a little nap."

"I'm not tired, Mother—it's my eyes."

"Don't the glasses help you, Peg?"

Glasses! What did her mother know about her poor, weak eyes? How sometimes, when she went too long without her glasses, the world seemed to swim before her, and she would feel herself getting dizzy and she would feel it even in her stomach, as if the swimming world were not only moving before her but swimming and turning in her stomach.

"What's the matter, Peg—did you break your glasses?"

"What do you care? When I was a little girl and needed glasses after I had diphtheria you wouldn't get them for me. And your son Al beat me because I wanted glasses and couldn't see without them," she snarled in anger.

"Sure, I remember how sick you were, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said, ignoring the accusations as though she hadn't heard them.

Peg glared at her mother.

—You old she-devil, she thought bitterly.

Her mother's composure and calm offended her.

"Peg, tell me—how's that old Mrs. McGann?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"How would I know?"

"Doesn't her daughter tell you about her?"

"She's all right, I guess," Peg answered without interest.

"I guess she's a good old thing."

"She never nags her daughter Frances."

"How is her daughter Frances?"

"She was off today—it was her day off."

"Well, you don't say? I wonder what she did. Do you think she went out with that schoolteacher? He's a pauper."

"I don't know—she doesn't tell me everything she does."

"Well, I just thought you'd know."

"I don't."

Margaret took a box of cork-tipped Melachrinos out of her purse on the dresser and lit one.

Mary O'Flaherty went to the kitchen.

Louise came into the bedroom.

"How are you, Louise darling?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, I'm all right, Peg," Louise answered in a soft voice.

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes, I think I do."

Margaret puffed nervously on her cigarette. She looked at Louise blankly.

—Louise and I are sisters. She is my sister, Margaret told herself.

She remembered Louise as a little girl, about the age of Danny boy. Oh, Louise had been a pretty little thing. She had often taken care of her. Why, she'd been like a mother to her younger sister. A flood of affection for Louise engulfed her. She remembered once how Al had whipped Louise. She didn't remember what Louise had done but she had been whipped. Louise had cried as if her heart would break, and she had known that Louise had sobbed not just because the whipping had hurt, hurt her little backside, but because it had hurt something deep inside her, hurt what was Louise herself. She, too, had been hurt that way by whippings and beatings. From their childhood she remembered tears, tears more than anything else. She remembered her own tears, and she remembered Louise's tears. Her poor, sad, sick baby sister. Oh, she wished she could take her with her to New York!

"When are you leaving, Peg?" Louise asked, sitting down beside Margaret on the bed.

"I don't know if I'll go."

"But why, Peg?" Louise asked, surprised.

"I don't think I ought to," Margaret said evasively.

How could she tell Louise that she herself was one of the reasons why?

"I can't afford it," Margaret said, still evasive.

"But, Peg, even Al says for you to go. Remember he did before he went back on the road?"

"Oh, he may have said it—but I can't leave the whole burden on his shoulders. I don't mind it; I don't mind making the sacrifice."

"Peg, don't be a fool. You go. You go and have a wonderful time, and when you come back you tell me all about it."

"It wasn't right of Ned—leaving us and getting married, leaving us to bear all of the burden here at home," Margaret said bitterly.

"But, Peg, he fell in love," Louise exclaimed.

"With a cripple—a half cripple," Margaret said sharply. —A cripple.

Was she herself any better than a cripple?

Louise straightened up and looked out the bedroom window. It was dark now. Another day was gone.

III

Louise and Margaret had gone into the parlor to sit with Old Tom. They sat silent and brooding. The sight of Danny bounding into the room changed their mood. A warm smile came on Margaret's face. Louise's smile was strained.

"Goodness, you must have had a good time," Margaret said affectionately. "Come here and give your aunt a kiss—dirt and all."

He went slowly to Margaret. She hugged him, kissed him.

"Now kiss me."

He obeyed, kissing her quickly on the cheeks. She pulled him to her and, bending forward, held his head against her heart. He strained to be released. She let him go. He turned to stare at Aunt Louise.

Louise wanted to call him to her and kiss him but she was afraid. Peg told her that she was run-down, but she knew better, and she was afraid for the little boy. Oh, God, she could give her disease to him. She wanted to hug him and kiss him, but she was afraid to, for his sake.

"Aunt Louise," he said in a disappointed tone of voice.

Her eyes opened wide at the sound of her name.

"You didn't ask me to kiss you."

She didn't know what to say. He would think she didn't love him. She was flustered. When she was a little girl, she

used sometimes to think that her mother and the others in the family didn't love her. The pain of that memory came back to her now.

Danny marched over and stood before her.

"Kiss me, Aunt Louise!" he commanded.

"Oh, Louise, he loves you so . . . Little Brother, Aunt Louise is your girl, isn't she? You're your Aunt Louise's beau, aren't you, Little Brother?"

With a feeling of helplessness and near panic, Louise leaned forward, reached her arms out, enfolded Danny, and kissed him on the head.

"Let me kiss you."

She gave him her cheek. He kissed her. Then he freed himself from her embrace.

"Son, son—where's me grandson?" Mary O'Flaherty called from the back.

"Go to Mother, she loves you, too, Little Brother," Margaret said.

"Here I am, Mother," Danny shouted, running out to his grandmother.

"It makes me so happy that we can give Daniel a good home," Margaret said.

"Yes," Louise agreed, thinking how much brighter their home had been since he had come to live with them.

"And he's so much better off here with us than with Lizz and Jim. Here he gets attention. Lizz hasn't time to give him any attention. And you can see it's good for him—he looks so healthy and happy."

"He's a beautiful little boy," Louise said.

"He looks like you, Louise honey," Margaret said as Danny skipped back into the parlor.

"I do," Danny said.

"Oh, Daniel," Margaret exclaimed, bursting into laughter.

"I do, don't I, look like you, Aunt Louise?"

"I don't know how I look. How do I look, Danny?"

"Beautiful."

"Why?"

"Because everybody says so—everybody says you're beautiful. Aunt Margaret says so. And Mother. And Mama. And me."

"Maybe they're just being nice to me, and maybe I'm not beautiful at all."

"Yes, you are, Louise," Margaret interrupted.

"See! See, Aunt Louise? Aunt Margaret says so."

"Little Brother, you love Aunt Louise, don't you?"

Danny turned an annoyed look at her.

Of course he loved his Aunt Louise. But he didn't like being asked. He didn't want to answer. He couldn't answer.

"Tell us what you did today, Danny," Aunt Louise asked him.

"I make the streetcar go on Indiana Avenue. I stand by the motor, I hold the switch like this, and zizz, I turn it on. The car goes. I put my foot on the bell like this, and gong, gong, ding, dong, the car goes. And zizz, I turned the handle and the car stops." Danny laughed. "It stopped fast." Danny laughed again. "It stopped so fast the people riding in the car almost fell out of their seats. They fell out of their seats this way."

Danny pitched face forward on the parlor rug.

They watched him, charmed, and for a few moments were taken out of themselves and away from their worries.

As he got to his feet again, Louise suddenly wished she could live her own childhood all over again. Danny's charm and childish spontaneity tore at her, wrapped her in a blanket of sadness.

"When I grow up, I'll be a motorman. I want to grow up to be a motorman. And a teamster."

"What's that you're after saying?" Old Tom asked him. "Me boy, if you become a teamster, it's only hard work you'll know. Hard work." He turned to his daughters and added, "Is that the best you two and your mother can teach him to want to be?"

"My friends work on the streetcars," Danny said.

"Who are your friends, Daniel?" Louise asked him.

"The motormen and conductors on the Fifty-first streetcars."

"How did you make friends with them?" Margaret asked.

Old Tom seemed to become uneasy, a trifle nervous. He let out a snort, but none of them paid attention to him. They were doting on Danny, who, as the focus of all of their attention, was smiling and gay.

"They are Father's friends. They drink beer out of a can with Father, and they buy me root beer."

Margaret and Louise rocked with kindly laughter.

"The little devil!" Old Tom exclaimed.

"Oh, Pa, you have a right to a drink of beer. There's nothing wrong with having a drink of beer. Why, Mother likes her drink of beer, too," Margaret said.

"What do the streetcar men say to you, Daniel?" Louise asked.

"They call me the Little Irishman."

"Son, son—wash your hands and face. It'll soon be time for your supper," Mary O'Flaherty said, appearing at the entrance to the parlor.

Danny raced out of the parlor noisily.

"I'm a fast railroad train. Twentieth Century, all aboard for New York!" he yelled.

They all smiled.

"I'll go help him get washed," Margaret said, rising.

"Sure, he can wash himself," Mary O'Flaherty said. "Sit yourself down and rest. You worked hard today, and sure, supper is about on the table."

Old Tom sighed.

"What's the matter, Father?" Margaret asked.

"Nothin', nothin' at all's the matter. Sure, I was just tellin' meself—'Tis another day that's endin'."

Chapter Twelve

I

THE apartment was very quiet. Danny and Old Tom were asleep. Mary O'Flaherty was in her own room off the kitchen. She was glad to have her own room, where she could get off by herself. When they'd moved here, she'd put her foot down and insisted on having it.

Margaret, sitting at the dining-room table, lit a cigarette. Louise watched her. She sometimes wished that, she could smoke, but she couldn't. When she had tried a cigarette a year or so ago she had coughed a lot and had felt a little sick. She hadn't liked the taste either. She admired Margaret for smoking. It wasn't bad, as many people thought, for a girl to smoke. Why shouldn't she if she wanted to? But if you smoked, you weren't a lady. She'd heard Al once say that a lady didn't smoke.

Margaret wasn't a lady. Her sister Margaret lived more than she, and was braver than she was. The spats and quarrels and differences they had now and then weren't important. She and Peg understood each other. Al didn't understand her or Peg. And her mother didn't. Her mother and father had grown up in such a different world.

But what was she thinking about, or trying to think about? She didn't really know. Thoughts were just coming and going in her head, and she wanted to be happy and she wasn't.

"Gosh, wasn't Little Brother dirty tonight? But he was so cute when we gave him a bath."

"He was like a little doll," Louise said.

They both smiled tenderly.

Louise remembered how she had felt not right, almost

ashamed, bathing Danny, seeing and touching his naked body.

"And after his bath, the way he ran around in his nightgown, touching everything and saying he was running around the world."

"Yes—I'm running around the world, Auntie Peg," Margaret said, smiling again.

They turned back to their own thoughts. Margaret kept drumming her fingers on the table.

She wished that Lorry were in Chicago tonight, taking her out. Oh, Lorry didn't know how hard it was on her. He came and went, and he never wrote to her because of his wife. He didn't love his wife. He couldn't, because he loved her. She was certain that he did.

She wanted to see him and be with him, now, tonight. And he wasn't in Chicago. Oh, those surprises, to get a telephone call and answer it and hear his voice! He had such a real man's voice. Sometimes it was so tender with her. Every day she woke up, excited with the hope that he might surprise her. It made her so nervous, living this way, waiting. But, oh, when he did call her!

If it were another girl meeting a man as wonderful as Lorry Robinson, why you could just be certain that it would be different. But this was just the way everything was in her life. It was always the same. She wasn't happy like other girls. Her life, her soul weren't her own. She looked up at Louise intently. Louise wasn't happy, either. What was the matter with the two of them? Why were they both so miserable?

"I saw Alice McGrath the day before yesterday, I met her on Randolph Street."

"How is she?" Louise asked, interested.

"She looked handsome—Alice always knew how to take care of herself. Even when we were little girls together, she was that way."

"I always liked her," Louise said.

"Louise, I always liked Alice too, and I admire her. Why when I saw her on the street, she looked exquisite. But

then . . ." Margaret paused. ". . . she can spend every cent she earns on herself . . . Catch her not thinking of herself, me first. Not Alice McGrath."

"Margaret, you know what I think. I've told you more than once."

"Oh, it's not you. I don't blame you, Louise dearie," Margaret said dejectedly. "I'm a fool, but Alice McGrath isn't. Catch her sacrificing herself for her family. She'd ditch them before she'd do that—the whole kit and kaboodle of them. If she had a chance to go to New York on a vacation, do you think she wouldn't take it and go?"

"But, Peg . . ." Louise interrupted.

"No. She wouldn't give up as much as the nail off her little finger."

"But, Peg, you're going to New York, aren't you?" Louise asked in bewilderment.

"Peg? Peg?" Mary O'Flaherty called from the kitchen.

They both looked toward her.

"Peg, were you talking about Alice McGrath? Tell me about her and her mother. How is her mother?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, her face alert with curiosity.

"Mother, you never miss a thing, do you?" Margaret said, her mood lifting.

At this moment the telephone in the hallway began to ring.

"I'll answer it," Margaret said, jumping up and running out of the room.

"What no-good, Protestant tinker is ringing the telephone at this time of night?" Mary O'Flaherty asked sarcastically as she came into the room.

"But, Mother, it isn't so late. It's only a quarter to nine," Louise said.

"Hello?" Margaret said anxiously into the telephone.

"When I was a girl in the old country, I was in bed and sound asleep at this time of night."

"Oh, George, how nice of you to phone me. Why, I w^{alms}alm just sitting here thinking of you," Margaret said flirtatious

"I knew it would be a tinker," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Louise wanted to tell her mother that this was America, not Ireland, but she said nothing.

"George? . . . George? . . . Who can it be? Louise, who's George?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"I'm not sure I know, Mother," Louise said.

"Why, no, I have nothing to do . . . And Louise . . ."

Louise's face lit up. An unhealthy flush came into her cheeks, and she suddenly looked very young and girlish.

Mary O'Flaherty left the room.

"I'll ask her . . ."

Mary O'Flaherty returned, with the holy water fountain which hung on her bedroom wall in her left hand.

"Louise," Margaret called.

Mary O'Flaherty dipped her talonlike fingers in the holy water and then swung her arm dramatically as though spreading the water about the dining room.

"Be gone, Satan!" she proclaimed.

"Do you want to go out with George Keller and a very nice friend of his, Louise?" Margaret called.

Indecisive and fearful, Louise turned to her mother.

"Louise, why don't you?" Margaret called.

"Yes, I'll go," Louise said boldly and impulsively.

II

Louise didn't know if it was right or wrong for her to go out on this date. Maybe it was bad. Maybe she shouldn't go. But how was it bad just to go out on a date? She didn't know who she would be with, but Peg knew George, and this other boy was a friend of George's, and Peg would be with her and no harm could come to her.

She was dressing. She stood before the bedroom mirror in her underwear and corsets. Her black silk stockings were gartered, and she liked them. Peg had given them to her as a present last payday.

Peg was in the bathroom.

Mother was raising Cain because she and Peg were going out. But she had a right to. She had a right to have fun, to enjoy herself.

"There you are." Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Mother, please let me alone," Louise asked.

"Let you alone. It's a switch I should be puttin' to your backside. Being said by her, instead of your mother. So you're going to be out to all hours of the night, running around with married men and the Devil knows who . . ."

"Mother, I'm not doing anything wrong."

Louise was nervously powdering her cheeks with a large, fluffy pink powder puff.

"I suppose next you'll be smoking cigarettas."

Louise turned about and said:

"But, Mother, you smoke a pipe."

She remembered how, as a little girl, she'd often been ashamed of her mother for smoking a pipe.

"It's me own business if I smoke a pipe, I'll have you know," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"I don't smoke, Mother."

"It's good that you don't or I'd tan your backside for you."

"But I have a right to go out on a date. I have a right to have some fun."

"Fun—ah, if you was raised the way I was, you wouldn't be talking this way. When I was your age, me mother would of tanned the hide off me with a switch to hear me talk like that."

"Mother, you were married when you were my age."

"Glory be to God," Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed.

As she turned to walk away, Margaret, also in underwear, corsets, and gartered black silk stockings, came into the room.

"Look at the two of them primping themselves like chip-pies," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Listen, you old crone, you were no saint in your day," Margaret said.

"Ah, I rue the day that you were born," Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed.

"Peg, please don't—" Louise began.

"Then let her let me alone," Margaret said, interrupting.

"I wash me hands of the two of you," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"You've been disowning me since the day I was born," Margaret accused.

"And I'll disown you again. I'll go to Father Costello."

"Go ahead—he likes his drink, too."

"Oh, that your arm may wither, speaking that way of a holy man, a priest of God."

"I saw him drunk in the hotel last week. He couldn't walk straight. Go and tell him that," Margaret flung back at her mother.

Louise went to the bed, sat down, and tears formed in her eyes. She began to sob.

"Look what you've done to her," Margaret said.

"She's crying because she's letting herself be said by you."

"Oh, oh, stop it. I can't stand it," Louise sobbed.

The doorbell rang.

"Oh, there they are. And we're not ready," Margaret said excitedly.

"I'll answer the door," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Come, Louise darling, brace up," Margaret said.

III

Mary O'Flaherty sat in the parlor with George Keller and his friend, Wallace Downs. She held a bouquet of red roses in her hand.

"Me daughters are slow."

"They can take their time. We have nothing to do but wait," George Keller said.

He was a plump, jolly-looking man of about thirty, clean-shaven, and nattily dressed in a striped blue suit, a pink silk shirt, and an expensive black knitted tie knotted thickly. His

friend, Wallace Downs, was thin and pale and tall, a mousy-looking man, dressed very conservatively in a dark blue serge suit.

"And you say you brought those flowers for me?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, sniffing at them. Their odor filled the parlor.

"We'll be ready in a moment, George," Margaret called in.

"Take your time, girls," George called back.

"They smell pretty," Mary O'Flaherty said. "But sure, you shouldn't have gone and spent your good hard-earned money buyin' roses for an old woman the likes of meself."

"Why, Mrs. O'Flaherty, the pleasure was all ours," George Keller said with exaggerated graciousness.

"Yes," Wallace Downs chimed in.

"And you look so spry and young. Why, I'm half-tempted, Mrs. O'Flaherty, to invite you to come along. Say, I bet you were a gay one in your time," George Keller said.

"Oh, I did a dance or two in me time," Mary O'Flaherty said, again sniffing the bouquet of roses.

"You did, you did a dance or two in your time, Mrs. O'Flaherty?" asked Wallace Downs.

"I'll bet you were the belle of old Ireland, Mrs. O'Flaherty," George Keller said.

"Sure, you're two nice, fine young men, I'll wager. I'll wager four cents that your mothers are proud of you."

"Oh, yes, I love my mother," Wallace Downs said.

"You're a good boy, you are," Mary O'Flaherty told him. "Me own son is the finest son in the world. He takes care of me. He pays the rent."

"I help my mother, too," Wallace Downs told her.

"My mother lives on a farm," George Keller said.

"You don't say? It isn't near Green Bay, Wisconsin, is it?"

"No, it isn't."

"'Tis a pity. Tom, me man, and I lived in Green Bay, Wisconsin, before we came to Chicago. That was before the children were born. Ah, it was cold in the winters in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The icicles froze on y^{ur} face."

"What do you think of that?" George Keller responded.

"Yes, what do you think?" Wallace Downs said.

"Do you mind if we smoke, Mrs. O'Flaherty?" George Keller asked.

"Ah, go ahead, smoke. You're good boys," she said.

They drew out packs of cigarettes and lit up.

Mary O'Flaherty sniffed at the bunch of roses.

IV

Margaret looked handsome, and Louise looked beautiful. They were both wearing blue suits, but of different styles. They had on wide dark hats, with veils over their faces. Their skirts came down to their shoes. They were corseted in and just slightly pinched at the waist.

They stood in the parlor a moment.

"Mrs. O'Flaherty, your daughters look like a million dollars," George Keller said.

"Two million dollars," Wallace Downs said.

"They're not fat enough," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Why, Mrs. O'Flaherty," George exclaimed, "and you so small and dainty."

"Oh, Mother likes fat people. She thinks women should be big and fat," Margaret told them.

"Margaret, whatever your mother says is aces high with me," George Keller said.

"Don't be making me head get swelled," Mary O'Flaherty said.

They laughed.

"Mother, you're so darling," Margaret exclaimed dotingly.

"Peg, the two of you should be dressed in red," Mary O'Flaherty said excitedly.

Margaret laughed. Then George Keller burst into a guffaw, and Wallace Downs self-consciously tried to imitate him.

Louise smiled now for the first time since she and Peg had come into the room. She'd dressed feeling that she shouldn't go out on this date, thinking that it was bad. Her mother

telling them that they were chippies and hussies had hurt her. Now, Mother was so different. Mother was a big bark and no bite at all. She should have known this when she cried a little while ago. Oh, she hoped those two fellows wouldn't notice that she had been crying. Peg said that they couldn't tell. Peg said that she looked stunning.

Now her spirits lifted. She was glad about the date. She wanted to have a good time. She wanted to laugh. And she liked George Keller. Of course, he was taking Peg, and she wouldn't even think of trying to take him away from her sister. She liked him because he was jolly, and laughed, and he said funny things that made you laugh. Mother liked him and the other young man, Wallace . . . Wallace, what was his name? Oh, yes, Downs.

"Sure, if I was going out, I'd wear a red blouse," Mary O'Flaherty said and they laughed.

"Why red, Mrs. O'Flaherty?" George Keller asked.

"So's all the people could see me."

They laughed again.

"Yes, Mrs. O'Flaherty, as I said a minute or so ago, I'm half-tempted to make a date with you myself," George Keller told her.

"Don't be makin' too free with me," she shot back.

"Why, Mother, George is only complimenting you," Margaret said.

"Well, it's time you all was leavin'—I don't want me daughters to be out too late."

"We'll take good care of them, just as good care as you would yourself," George Keller said cheerfully, ignoring the sharpness of Mary O'Flaherty's last two remarks.

"Yes, Mrs. O'Flaherty," Wallace Downs said.

"Have a good time, all of you," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Margaret kissed her mother.

"Don't be makin' too free with me," she told her daughter. "Have a good time."

V

They were gone gallivanting, and nere she was with Tom and her grandson sleeping. But they were such fine young men.

The parlor rocker creaked under her.

—It was nice of them to give me the flowers.

It had been a long time since she had smelled flowers. The roses smelled like the roses in the old country when she was a girl.

—What will I be doing with roses at my age?

—It was nice for that Mr. Keller to bring me these roses. The house was so quiet.

—I could hear a pin drop.

—I must go and see if me grandson is covered up.

She turned and went quietly to Danny's small bedroom off the hallway. She opened the door gently and slid into the dark room on tiptoe. An overwhelming feeling of love for her grandson came upon her. She sidled over to his bed.

—Sleepin' like an angel, she told herself.

She bent down and carefully pulled the covers up closer to his neck.

—Ah, how I love me 'ttle grandson.

She stood a moment, gazing down at him in the darkness, listening to his even breathing.

—Ah, if he was only me own son.

She almost cried.

Then she quietly slid out of the room and went to her bedroom. She rocked slowly on her chair.

—I'm an old woman, Mary O'Flaherty thought.

Back and forth she rocked. Back and forth. The rocking chair squeaked a little. The motion soothed her.

What use is there for an old woman?

—An old woman is better off dead than alive.

The squeak of the rocker broke in on the silence of the apartment. The motion soothed her. Rocking, swinging back,

coming forward, she liked to rock. She liked her old rocking chair. There was little enough she had in this world, and she'd be in the poorhouse, and Pa would be in the poorhouse, too, if it weren't for her son Al taking care of them. For many a one their age had gone to die in the poorhouse and be buried in Pauper's Field.

Well, she and poor Pa would never be buried in Pauper's Field. Their old bones would have a respectful restingplace in holy ground and not be thrown in with the bones of the beggars and the tinkers.

"Fifty dollars," she said aloud.

Their restingplace was paid for. Fifty dollars of hard-earned money for that plot in Calvary Cemetery. They had bought it years ago, long ago before Louise was even born. She well remembered herself and Pa looking at the deed. There were their names on it, and it said by law that she and Pa owned it. They couldn't read a word of it, and when Pa signed the papers he marked an X, and they told her to make her X, and, glory be to God, she had to have the man show her how to make her X.

She sighed. Yes, that had been a proud day when she and Pa had gotten the deed for their own burying lot. Pa, poor man, was old now. He wasn't so well, not so well as she was, with nary a gray hair in her head.

—The truth is I'm old meself. Me and Pa, soon enough we'll be going out there to sleep.

—Sure, she suddenly told herself, there's no harm in slipping out and getting a can of beer to wet me whistle.

Quickly she got her large black knitted shawl from her closet and wrapped it around her head and shoulders, took the beer can, and noiselessly left by the front door.

She scurried along Indiana Avenue to Forty-seventh Street. Sure, she'd be back in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Her little grandson was asleep. Pa was in the house. If he cried, Pa would hear him and she'd be home again in a jiffy. Her little grandson was a sound sleeper.

She turned at Forty-seventh, crossed the street, and walked on toward Prairie Avenue. She entered the saloon by the side where it was marked Family Entrance. A bell rang.

Several couples were seated at tables drinking. She took them in with a glance. The ladies with their big hats and their fine clothes, they looked like chippies to her—hussies, street-walkers.

A tall waiter appeared.

"Yes, Mother," he said.

"Mother, me eye—give me a can of beer, please, sir, for me man."

"I'll be glad to," he said.

A blond lady with a big bosom and satin dress smiled at her.

—That one won't make free and easy with me, Mary told herself.

VI

Rubbing his eyes, Danny came out of his room barefooted and ran to the bathroom. He couldn't reach up to turn on the light. He got close to the toilet bowl. He wished the light was on because he liked to watch himself do number one. He liked to do lots of it, but he couldn't do as much or make as much noise as Uncle Al or Bill did. He guessed his Papa made a lot. Father was alway going to the bathroom to do number one.

It was bad to think this way about going to the bathroom. Maybe it was a sin. Sins were bad. You committed sins when you did bad things and were ready to make your first holy communion.

Danny finished in the bathroom, pulled the chain, and came out. There was a light in the dining room and a dim electric light burning ahead of him by the front door.

Why was the house so quiet if the lights were lit? He began to feel himself becoming afraid. It was like being afraid went through you like a wind inside yourself and you could feel it. Being afraid was like wind going through his chest right this minute.

Where was everybody?

"Mother?" he called out tentatively, searchingly, in a low voice. She didn't answer.

"Mother?" he called more loudly.

He waited a fraction of a second for an answer. It was a long time. Mother didn't answer.

Danny stood still in a paralysis of fear.

She didn't answer. Where was she?

He walked fearfully to the kitchen. The kitchen was dark. He stood looking into the darkness, afraid to go in.

"Mother!" he cried out.

Where was Mother?

What was in the dark kitchen? The bogeyman? The Devil? He dared not go in. Something would happen. He had to find Mother.

"Mother!" he called in an agonized voice.

He plunged through the kitchen into his grandmother's bedroom. It was full of darkness. Mother wasn't in her room.

"Mother?" he called out plaintively.

He turned and fled from the room in terror, and, running in the hallway, he fell and bruised his knee. He cried. He got to his feet and ran into the parlor. It was dark.

Mother was gone.

There was a noise. Someone was outside in the hall. Maybe it was someone coming to take him away? Maybe it was the bogeyman. He waited . . . a door in the hallway. The footsteps. Somebody was going upstairs to the Mortons. Panicky, he looked about the dark parlor. Maybe the bogeyman was in a corner.

"Mother!" he shrieked.

He was stiff with terror.

VII

With his hands on the wheel of the hired Rambler automobile, George Keller's round, well-fed face was smug and

beaming with satisfaction. Just for fun, he kept tooting the rubber horn, and they all laughed at the sound it made.

"That's to get horses and sundry slow-moving vehicles out of our way."

"How fast you going, George?" Wallace Downs asked from the rear seat.

"Twenty-five miles an hour."

"I know girls who have never ridden in an automobile," said Margaret. She was seated beside George in the front.

"So do I," Louise said, her voice excited.

They were driving along Lake Shore Drive.

"Has your mother ever ridden in an automobile, Peg?" George asked.

"Yes, once, but my married sister never has—at least I don't think she has."

"How did your mother like it?"

"She loved it."

"Ah, she's a grand old gal, and you two sisters are just as grand."

"George, you're just saying that to compliment us."

"Oh, no, Margaret. He means it," Wallace said.

Louise began to hum a tune from *The Chocolate Soldier*.

They were driving 'long Lincoln Park. Louise looked out at the lake, dark and black. She was glad to be alive and young. Still humming, she told herself that she wanted to fall in love.

VIII

"Mother, have a glass of beer with us," the buxom blonde called across the saloon to Mary O'Flaherty.

"No, thank you, my dear. What a fine, big, pretty woman you are."

"She is, isn't she, Grandma?" said the fat man who was with the blonde.

"That's sweet of you to tell me. Have a glass of beer, Mother."

"No, thank you. I don't make free and easy with any one."

"Oh, please, Mother, a quick glass," the blonde pleaded.

"One glass won't hurt me," Mary O'Flaherty said, speaking as though she were talking aloud to herself.

"Come, Grandma—we'd like you to join us," the fat man said, rising.

Mary O'Flaherty went to their table. Sitting down with the fat man, she said:

"I'll have to be quick. Me man and me grandson are home."

The waiter returned with the can, filled up and foamy with beer.

"Bring the lady a glass of beer," the fat man said, "and take the can back. When the lady is leavin' you can bring it to her."

The waiter nodded and left.

"You're a nice, fine gentleman. Me son is a gentleman."

"I'm sure he is, having a mother like you," the fat man told her.

"My mother's dead," the blonde said sentimentally.

"Ah, you poor girl. I'll pray for her, may her soul rest in peace. Tell me, what do you do?"

Flustered, the blonde glanced off. Then she gazed knowingly at the fat man.

"She's a rich lady and doesn't have to work," the fat man said, and the blonde seemed relieved.

"Isn't that grand?"

The waiter brought the beer.

"There you are, Grandma," the fat man said. "A glass of beer never hurt anyone."

"Thank you, thank you, sir. You're a good man."

Mary O'Flaherty picked up her glass and drank.

"Are you married?" she asked, looking at the fat man.

"No, Grandma, I'm not."

"Sure, what's the matter with you—why don't you marry her?" She pointed at the blonde. "She's such a fine, big lady. Sure, if I was you, I'd marry her . . . I was married at sixteen."

They laughed self-consciously.

"Maybe she wouldn't have me," the fat man said.

"And why? What's wrong with you?"

"Oh, nothing's wrong with him," the blonde said.

"You just need the push to do it. I had to give me man a push in Brooklyn, New York. That was just after Mr. Lincoln was shot."

"But you look so young," the fat man said.

"I keep meself young fightin', making them all toe the mark at home."

Pleased with the attention she was getting, she took another drink from her glass. Then she finished and said:

"I have to be whisting home now to me grandson and me man. But thank you, and if you'll be said by me, you'll be getting yourself a wife."

IX

Danny sat at the dining-room table, tight with fear. The floors made scary noises. The house was scary. It made him afraid. He looked fearfully and quickly around the room. There was no one there, no one to see. But it was like there was somebody watching him, somebody who had come to get him and take him away and hurt him and do he didn't know what to him.

He wanted to go into the parlor and look out the window for Mother to come back, but the parlor was dark. Maybe the bogeyman could only get you in the dark. Maybe if the light was on the bogeyman couldn't get you and carry you away.

There was a noise in the ceiling now.

Fear beat inside him like a drum. He was a giant drum, and the bogeyman was beating him with fear.

Where was Mother?

He was afraid.

Where was Mother?

He was afraid. He was afraid.

Then he heard the key turning in the lock of the front door.

He ran to it frantically.

"Mother," he said accusingly, his voice breaking.

"Why, son, I thought you was asleep!" she said.

He could smell the beer. He didn't like the smell of beer. He didn't want Mother drinking beer.

"I slipped down to the corner," she said quickly.

"You were gone a long time."

"Son, were you afraid?"

"No," he said quickly.

"Come, let me get me shawl off and tuck you back in bed."

"Why did you go out?"

"Your grandfather was here. If you were afraid, son, you could call him."

He hadn't thought of calling Father. Why hadn't he thought of Father?

Following her to the rear of the apartment, he asked:

"Where did Auntie Peg and Auntie Louise go, Mother?"

"They went out with some gentlemen friends."

She set the beer on the kitchen table, dropped her shawl on the rocking chair in her room, and went to him.

"Come, son—I'll tuck you in."

He followed her meekly. He climbed back into his bed. He felt safe now, protected. But he was hurt, betrayed, as if he had been deserted.

She bent down and kissed him.

He didn't like the kiss. She smelled of beer.

She tucked him in and said very tenderly:

"Go to sleep now, me son."

He didn't answer.

He heard her slipping out of the room. He heard the far-off sound of a train whistle in the night. He started to cry softly.

Why had she gone out?

Why had she left him?

Why had she come back with beer on her breath?

X

—Maybe you are better off dead, Mary O'Flaherty bitterly thought to herself as she sat at the kitchen table with her can of beer before her.'

She lifted the can, and after having a swig she wiped her lips carelessly, with the back of her thin, veined hand.

Who needed her now but Pa, an old man, and her grandson? Her daughters were going out with men now and working, and her son Al was a grown man. Why, he was almost forty, her son Al was. Almost forty, and he was only a boy in her sight, and she 'couldn't see him as a man almost forty instead of a boy, her oldest son. Sure, didn't she remember him feeding at her breasts. Now they were old breasts, with no milk in them.

—Was it worth it?

Coming out here an innocent girl, and she was six weeks on the boat, six weeks with the boat rolling and tossing and the waves coming big and splashing on the deck of the ship.

—Queenstown harbor.

Oh, the sun was shining on the water and the sun was shining on the land beside the harbor, and the hills, and there were ships, so many ships, and there she was standing beside the rail looking at the land, seeing Ireland for the last time.

—I'll never go back.

—And with me mother dead and buried and in her grave, God have mercy on her soul, and me father resting in his grave beside me mother, may the Lord have mercy on his soul. . . .

Again she lifted her can.

—What is there for me to be going back to?

—And what is there for me here?

—Coming out to America to work hard and bear the pains of having children and grow old with them all raised, and me man in there asleep, himself not well at all.

—And what is me son Al doing tonight, alone in a hotel room?

—And me son Ned, married in Madison, Wisconsin?

—And his poor sick wife?

She sighed.

—And I didn't know hide nor hair of what it would be like here in America, thousands, yes thousands of miles away from the old country.

—Pa coming out and me coming out to be greenhorns.

—Is it a greenhorn I am?

A belligerent look came on her face. She lifted the can again to take another drink of beer. She set the can back on the table. Ah, and maybe it would have been better if she and Pa had never come out here to America. All these years with the poor man working so hard, and now there he was, asleep in the front of the house, old and tired. She loved Pa.

Chapter Thirteen

I

SURE, we're glad to see you back from New York, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"And am I glad to be back! . . . I had a wonderful time, but there's no place like home," Margaret said.

She'd been saying over and over again that she had had a simply wonderful time in New York. But had she? Had she ever been as lonely in her whole life as she had been that first night at the Hotel Imperial? She'd been alone in a city full of millions of strangers. And back here, there had been her poor father and Louise. Well, she was back now.

"Ah, Peg, and I liked that post card picture of the Brooklyn Bridge," Old Tom said. His eyes twinkled. "Sure, the Brooklyn Bridge was too high for that Steve Brodie, so he jumped off it."

Louise interrupted, "You shouldn't have spent your money buying me that lovely nightgown—it's lovely, but you should have spent the money on yourself."

"It's nothing, Louise darling—I had such a good time shopping in the stores, and I took the rubberneck bus to the Bowery and Chinatown. It was so interesting."

"You don't say?" exclaimed Mary O'Flaherty. "Are the ladies more stylish in New York, Peg, than they are here?"

"I saw lots of gorgeously dressed women in New York—lots of them, on Fifth Avenue."

"And tell me about the big buildings, Peg."

"There's the Woolworth Building, it's simply beautiful.

And the Flatiron Building. It's built so that it's shape's like a flatiron, but I didn't like it much."

"And tell me more about me sister, the holy nun," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Mother, it's just as I said, she's so lovely, so sweet, so human. She took me through her orphan asylum and introduced me to the nuns."

"Think of it, me own sister a holy nun and running that big orphan asylum."

"And the nuns and the little boys love her. One nun told me that Sister is the best Mother Superior she ever had."

"She can read and write," Mary O'Flaherty said proudly.

"I knew her when she was sprightly enough," Old Tom said.

"That she was—why, every one of the young men in the old country was after her before we came out. Me sister could have had the lot of them."

"She was a pretty lass," Old Tom said. "But so were you, Mary."

"Me sister was prettier."

"Mother," Margaret said, "she wanted to know all about you and about everyone in the family."

"Ah, I'd like to be seeing me sister again," Mary O'Flaherty said.

A smile broke across Margaret's face.

"Sister is wonderful, the way she handles poor orphan boys. She is like a mother to all of them—over a thousand."

"Ah, she had a kind heart, me sister did."

"Two of the boys got into a fight the way boys do . . . Margaret was smiling again, ". . . and do you know what Sister did?"

"Tell me, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"She locked them in a room with herself, sat down and had them fight, and then she told them to shake hands and make up. And since then they've been the best of friends, and she hasn't had any trouble with them. She told me that

there is no such thing as a bad boy if you handle a boy right and are kind to him."

The tears came to Mary O'Flaherty's eyes.

"It does me heart good to hear you tell of me sister, Peg," she said.

"Mother!" Louise exclaimed.

"Let her cry, Louise," Margaret said.

"The tears come to me old eyes when I hear of her, and she and I running barefooted together in the old country." She wiped her eyes. "Peg, tell me more about New York," she said.

Margaret was tired now of talking. She didn't know what more to say. But she felt important because of her trip. Why wasn't a trip ever as wonderful as you thought it would be? Why wasn't life as wonderful as you wanted it to be?

Suddenly, she felt empty. She didn't want to talk any more. Her trip was over with, gone. It was just as if she had never been away.

She heard the footsteps of Martha Morton upstairs. She wanted to go up and talk with Martha. But if she did, her mother might nag her. She looked about the table restlessly. Why should she hesitate about going upstairs to talk with her friend? Why should she do this because Al and her mother didn't like Martha Morton?

"I'm going upstairs to say hello to Martha Morton," she said, getting up from her chair.

Her cigarettes. Martha didn't like anyone smoking her cigarettes. She went to her bedroom to get her own.

"Take a bottle of holy water with you to protect yourself from Satan," Mary O'Flaherty called out.

But Margaret had left the apartment and didn't hear her.

• II

"Dearie, I missed you," Martha Morton said.

She was in a bathrobe, and her red hair was uncombed and disorderly. She yawned and began scratching her thigh.

They sat in the parlor. Margaret noticed the dust under the

chairs and on the mantelpiece. The furniture wasn't attractive. Margaret could see that Martha was lazy and took no pride in her home. But why shouldn't she be? Was a neat, clean home for a man you don't love the best thing in the world?

They puffed on their cigarettes. Some ashes dropped off Martha's, falling on her bathrobe and on the glaring, bright blue rug. With a lazy gesture she casually brushed them off her robe. She yawned again and sank back in the big chair.

"You must have had a wonderful time, Peg dearie."

"Oh, I did. I had a very good time."

"New York must be grand."

"Oh, Martha, it is. After New York, what is Chicago? Poo—it's nothing. There's so much wealth and elegance there."

"When I leave Mr. Morton, I'm going to New York. If he was a man he'd pick up and go there and make something of himself. But you can't get silk out of a sow's ear."

"How is he?"

"Didn't you hear him hacking and coughing last night? I didn't get a wink of sleep. If he'd keep me awake being a man, that would be one thing—but to keep me awake with his hacking and coughing! That's why my house isn't cleaned; I don't have the energy. But, Peg, tell me, was New York exciting?"

"I was never so excited in all my life, Martha," Margaret answered. There was no use in telling Martha how she really felt.

"Tell me all about it. Come and I'll make a cup of tea and you'll tell me all about it."

They went into the kitchen.

Martha's kitchen was almost as dirty as Lizz's. And Martha had no children. The disorderliness of Martha's whole apartment gave Margaret a feeling of superiority. Of course, she liked Martha; but Martha was a sloppy woman, with none of her own refinement. Because, yes, she was refined. Why, almost everyone she knew thought so. Martha could never

go as far in life as she could. Martha could never interest and attract men of the caliber that she interested and attracted.

"Did you meet any millionaires in New York, Peg?" Martha asked.

"No," Margaret said.

Suddenly she was sorry that she had told Martha about Lorry Robinson.

"Why, Peg O'Flaherty, I'm disappointed in you. In New York for one whole week and not even one millionaire on the hook!" Martha's voice was raucous.

Margaret stared at the sunny air through the dirty dining-room window. She'd come up here wanting to say so much about her trip to New York. Now she had nothing to say. The trip seemed to have gone out of her memory, to have happened long ago. She felt as if she had been back a long time instead of just having gotten off the train yesterday.

"Oh, Peg," Martha said with ingratiating friendliness, "if you knew how much I envy you. Why, if I could take a trip like yours I don't think you could ever get me back. I'd let Mr. Morton stew here in his own sour juices. Tell me all about it, Peg. I'm just dyin' to hear."

"I don't know how to begin, Martha. It was so lovely. Everything was so lovely."

"It must have been."

"I stayed in the swellest hotel, the Hotel Imperial, right off Broadway. And, gee, is the Twentieth Century a swell train."

"I'll bet it is."

"Did it go fast! And, Martha, why I never realized it, what a big country America is."

"And tell me about the styles and the women. How do we compare with those New York sirens and vampires?"

"Oh, I saw such lovely clothes," Margaret answered.

The doorbell suddenly rang. It seemed to shock Martha, and her reaction made Margaret uneasy. Margaret guessed that it was a man coming to see Martha. She hoped her mother

hadn't been looking out the parlor window where she could have seen him.

The bell rang again.

"That's another bill collector, Peggy darling. Can you answer the door for me and get rid of him, tell him I'm not in, get rid of him for me?"

"Sure, sure, leave it to me, Martha," Margaret said confidently.

"If Mr. Morton was half a man, my door wouldn't be stormed by bill collectors every day," Martha Morton said bitterly.

III

"Peg," Martha said seriously, her husky voice sympathetic, "Peg, ever since I've known you I've been telling you that if you don't look out for yourself no one else will. No man ever will. The best man that ever lived won't. He'll think of himself, and of what he wants. And when he gets it, he goes to sleep and forgets you." Martha lit another cigarette. "Peg, what is love?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I do. I married for love and look what I got. I didn't even get a man. At best I got half of a man, if that."

"Yes, I know, Martha. I'm no fool about men."

"You don't get enough out of them, Peg. Dearie, don't be mad at me, don't get angry with me. I'm not telling you this to be criticizing, the way that brother of yours does. I'm telling you this for your own good, because I'm your friend. Don't be a fool, Peg dearie. Don't let any man make a fool of you—you're too good for that."

"I won't—don't worry, Martha. I've had my experiences. I've paid the price but I've learned my lessons. From now on I'm thinking of myself, of A-number-one first."

"That's the way to talk, dearie," Martha exclaimed enthusiastically. "Here, dearie, I'll get some warm tea."

Was Martha jealous of her, talking to her this way? Look at her home and look at the man she got!

"Here's a fresh cup of tea, Peg dearie."

"Oh, thank you, Martha."

"Now tell me more about your trip, Peg. I can't understand how you were in New York a whole week and didn't get a man."

"Plenty of men tried to attract me. But I have no use for mashers. But I did see the Statue of Liberty. Oh, it was a grand sight. It was inspiring."

Martha's face went blank.

"I guess you're smarter than I am, Peg. I wouldn't waste my time in New York lookin' at statues."

"I didn't just waste my time seeing statues. I shopped and . . ."

"But you didn't see a man. Peg, I say this as a friend."

"Martha, we all make our mistakes," Margaret said sharply. Martha's eyes narrowed in anger.

Margaret felt resentment against Martha flaring inside her. She cautioned herself not to get angry, not to get involved in a fight with Martha. But who did Martha think she was?

—And what business is it of yours if I saw the Statue of Liberty instead of trying to pick up a man?

"I know how to live my own life," Margaret said curtly.

"I didn't say you didn't, Peg dearie," Martha replied with poisonous sweetness. "But if I had your chances, Peg dearie, I'd certainly make the most of them."

"I'd tie a can to Mr. Morton and fast, Martha . . ."

"That's my business, Peg . . ."

"And it's my business if I want to go see the Statue of Liberty."

"Who said it wasn't?"

"You did, Martha."

"Why, Peg, I certainly did not!"

"You did too. You criticized me because I took a ferryboat ride to see the Statue of Liberty."

"Well, of all the—"

"You did," Margaret interrupted.

"I did not. For all I care you can go see the Statue of Liberty ten thousand times."

"I thought you were my friend," Margaret said tragically.

"I would be if you'd let me."

"Let you—I've always done things for ybu. I've gotten dates for you—dates with fine men."

"Fine men. If I couldn't do better than those fourflushers! If there is one thing that crawls on the face of this earth that I detest, it's a fourflusher."

"You've got your nerve, Martha, you've got a hell of a nerve, calling my friends fourflushers."

"Listen, Peg O'Flaherty," Martha shot back loudly, "don't try to put on the dog with me. You and your brother putting on the dog up and down Indiana Avenue. And what are you? The children of greenhorns!"

"Don't you dare talk against my father and mother, Martha Morton!"

"I see your mother sneaking out, rushing the can, don't I?"

"I've seen you so drunk, Martha Morton, that you couldn't stand on those big legs of yours."

"Oh, the lily-white Peg O'Flaherty—the lily-white lily of the valley, Peg O'Flaherty. Balls! Balls! Balls!"

"You wish Mr. Morton had them, don't you?"

"Why, Peg O'Flaherty—I never never thought that I had taken a bitch to my bosom. A bitch to my bosom."

"You have a hell of a lot of nerve calling anyone a bitch."

Margaret stood up, her eyes flashing angrily.

"I'll never darken your door again as long as I live. I'll never speak to you again as long as I live."

"Get the hell out of my house, you greenhorn's daughter. Get the hell out fast, before I throw you out."

Peg stood facing Martha, her eyes on fire. Martha took a step forward.

"Don't you dare lay your fat hands on me or I'll scream

for the police. I'll have you arrested for assault and battery."

"Lay my hands on you—soil my hands! I'll have you know I'm not the daughter of people who kept pigs in the parlor."

"You should talk—you're a pig yourself."

"Oh, God," Martha shrieked as tears poured down her cheeks. "Oh, God, that I took such a bitch to my bosom."

"Martha Morton!—"

"I'm Mrs. Morton to you—"

"Martha Morton, you'll pay for insulting me. You'll pay, just as sure as there is a God, you will."

"I'll give you the five dollars I owe you just as soon as—"

"You'll pay for the insults you have made against me. I was your best friend. You'll pay before God and man."

"I hope to God that your ovaries turn to piss," Martha Morton screamed after her as Margaret slammed the door.

Chapter Fourteen

I

WHAT's got into Aunt Peg?" Bill asked Danny. "She bawled me out a few minutes ago when she let me in at the door, and I didn't do nothin' to her. Mama told me to come up and see you all."

"Oh, she had a fight with Mrs. Morton, the neighbor woman upstairs."

"Mama had a fight yesterday with Mrs. Foley who lives on our block."

"Did Mama cry after fighting with her neighbor woman, Bill?"

"Say, what do you think Mama is—cryin' when she fights with a neighbor woman. Mama cry when she fights with the women on LaSalle Street! She comes home and starts wavin' the bread knife like it was a sword."

"Aunt Peg always cries after she has a fight."

"If Papa socks Mama she'll cry, and then she'll run in the kitchen and grab the bread knife. But I never seen her use it—she talks about it, but I never seen her use a bread knife."

Danny listened avidly.

"Mother likes to talk about hitting people with the frying pan."

"Mama could lick Aunt Margaret or Mother if they had a fight, just like I could lick you. And Papa could lick Uncle Al or Father, too."

"Let's play," Danny said quickly.

"I'll show you my baseball pictures."

Bill drew from his pocket the pictures of baseball players that came in packages of cigarettes.

"Here, know who that is?"

"No."

"That's Joe Tinker."

Danny reached for the pictures.

"Don't grab."

"Let me see it, Bill, please let me see it."

"Don't bend it or get it dirty. It's one of my favorite pictures in my collection."

Bill handed the picture to Danny. Danny saw a ball player in a white uniform, against a wine-red background. His body was half turned, and he held a bat in his hands.

"His bat is bent like a cane."

"Are you blind? No it isn't. Show me where it is."

"Here, where his hands are holding it."

"You're blind. It's straight."

Danny looked. The bat had seemed crooked like a cane. Now it didn't. He blinked his eyes. Everything seemed dizzy. He wouldn't tell Bill. Bill might laugh at him. He sat down on the floor because things looked dizzy. His eyes began to water.

"What you cryin' for?"

"I'm not crying. In my eyes."

"You don't know anything about baseball. What's the use of showin' you my pictures?"

"Tell me, Bill. I want to know. Tell me about baseball and let me see the pictures. Please, Bill."

"Well, here's Addie Joss."

"Who's he?"

Mary O'Flaherty appeared in the parlor.

"Are you plaguin' me grandson?"

"No, I'm playing with him."

"We're havin' a good time, Mother."

"Come out to the kitchen and let me give you both a glass of milk," she said.

"I don't want any milk," Danny said petulantly.

"Son, you be said by your grandmother," Mary O'Flaherty said as they followed her out to the kitchen.

II

With the children in the parlor and the women in the dining room, there was no place in his own home where a man could sit down and smoke his pipe in peace.

—I say this, you say that, and then the women are at it. Fighting one minute, crying the next. And afterwards, they're bosom friends no less.

Old Tom sat on his bed, took his corncob from his mouth, held it aloft, and slowly wagged his head. Ah, the man was never born yet that understood a woman.

He puffed on his pipe again and gazed at his pink bedroom wall.

He loved his daughters, indeed he did, but they were women, too. They were grown up now, and they were like their mother. One way this minute, another way the next. Take Peg. One day she and that Morton upstairs were thick as thieves. Then, quick as a wink, they were ready to spring at each other's throats, and Margaret was down here crying and that Morton one was upstairs crying, and Margaret was walking up and down the house in tears, and he could hear that Morton one upstairs walking back and forth and she was having the boohoos, and what in the name of good God Himself was it all about?

—Fathom it I can't, he told himself, again wagging his head.

A smile crept across his lips. He held his pipe, licked his mustache with his tongue, and thought how that Mr. Morton would be catching plenty of the old Ned when he came home from work tonight. Poor man!

Ah, with the women a man was best off to be seen and not heard, indeed, he was. Until a man got old, he couldn't live easy without them and he couldn't live easy with them. And when he was old, it wasn't much that he meant to them, and

when they cackled with one another, then there was no place for a man.

And now the children were at it and Danny was yelling at his brother, and there was a commotion in the parlor.

—Yes, Pa told himself, I had better be sleeping before they get me mixed up in this commotion.

He put his pipe down on the top of his disordered dresser, took off his shoes, and lay down with his hands resting on his stomach.

Let them have their commotion. It was quiet and peaceful here in his little room with the door closed.

III

"He's too old for me grandson," Mary O'Flaherty said, lowering her voice and implying an almost mysterious meaning to her words.

"I don't see why Lizz doesn't keep him at home," Margaret complained. "Don't we do enough for her by keeping Danny boy and giving her money? What does she want us to do, live her life for her? Her children were her pleasure, not ours."

Louise blushed.

"He takes after the long-drink-of-water father of his, and me grandson takes after me," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Older boys, older brothers are always bossy with their younger sisters and brothers," Margaret said, a touch of resentment in her voice.

"Bill is only nine years old. We shouldn't be too hard on him," Louise said.

Laying her wrinkling hand on the dining-room table, Mary O'Flaherty pronounced:

"When I was nine years old, I was helping me mother with the housework, and me sister was too."

"Oh, Mother, this isn't Ireland, this is America and things are different here," Margaret said with impatience.

"Right is right and wrong is wrong," Mary O'Flaherty proclaimed.

"What caused the trouble between them?" Louise asked.

"Willie boy was teasing Danny boy," Margaret answered.

"About what?" Louise asked.

"I don't know. It was just something or other—you know the way children are," Margaret said. "They like each other, and after all, they are brothers."

They heard walking upstairs. Margaret glanced up at the ceiling.

"You'd think she wore hobnailed shoes or something, the way she walks."

"The Devil is in the Morton hussy," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Louise looked off out the window with a dreamy expression in her eyes. It was sunny out, and the sunny air made her yearn. Oh, she wanted something. She wanted a happiness that would warm her like the sun.

But was it right for her to be dissatisfied like this? All her life, perhaps because she was the youngest, the baby of the family, she had had somebody telling her what to do. And because she wasn't strong like her sisters they had all treated her better than Margaret.

Mother didn't like girls, but Mother liked her. She guessed Mother had been nicer to her as a little girl than she'd been to Margaret. Now she sometimes felt bad about it.

Louise looked across the table at Margaret. She wanted to tell her this. She wanted to tell Peg lots of things.

"Ah, I don't know why you're going out tonight," Mary O'Flaherty said sharply, looking at Louise.

"Oh, let her go," Margaret said.

"If I could write I'd write a letter, I tell you. I'd write a letter to me son and I'd tell him what goings-on there are in his house when he's on the road to take care of me."

She wanted to tell her mother that it wasn't bad to go out. She wasn't going to sin. At confession to Father Costello last Saturday she had no mortal sins against the sixth commandment to confess. All she wanted to do was live her own life. But they were always telling her what to do.

No, she wasn't going out tonight to sin. She wasn't going out to . . . She couldn't use the word for it even in her own mind. She wasn't going to . . . she wasn't going to violate the sixth commandment and stop being a virgin.

"Is it a married man that's takin' you out?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"No . . . I told you all about it, Mother," Louise said in a piqued tone of voice. "And I'm not seriously interested in Art Shaeffer. I told you, Mother."

"Goddamn it!" Margaret exploded.

"Please, Peg. Please, Mother!" Louise begged.

But it was too late. They were at each other, and it was over her. She could feel her insides tightening up. Oh, if she could only get out of here! How could she stop them, calling each other terrible names?

Old Tom suddenly appeared in his stocking feet.

"Will you be quiet and let a man sleep and hear his own thoughts?" he said angrily.

Then Danny came and stared at them just as Mary O'Flaherty raised her thin arms and made a clawlike gesture and cursed.

Bill came out to watch too.

Oh, Louise thought, was there no way to stop them, to get away from this? The knot was getting tighter and tighter inside her. She wouldn't cry. She wouldn't. But oh, her poor heart. It was breaking.

"What are you doing here?" Margaret snapped when she noticed Bill. "Their mother's pleasure, not mine."

"Don't be sayin' words to me oldest daughter's son," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"In the name of God, will the pack of you stop!" Old Tom yelled.

"You put gray hairs in your own husband's head, you old witch," Margaret screamed.

From upstairs, they heard Martha Morton stamping on the floor and pounding on the radiator pipes.

Old Tom put his hands to his stomach and walked out of the room, his face contorted in pain.

Louise ran out of the room, flung herself on the bed, and sobbed.

Danny watched with troubled, bewildered eyes. Bill sneaked out and stole a cigarette from Margaret's big black pocket-book, which lay on the hall table.

"What's that chippy upstairs doin' makin' all that noise?" Mary O'Flaherty asked as she looked up at the ceiling.

Margaret paused just as she was about to curse her mother.

"I'm going upstairs and give her a piece of my mind," she said.

"Ah, that she should die and that the worms and maggots should eat her."

"Mother, have you got a nickel? I'll phone her and give her a good piece of my mind."

Mary O'Flaherty fumbled in the pocket of her gingham apron and pulled out a nickel with shreds of tobacco clinging to it.

"Here, Peg, give her hell, give her hell."

She sat down and calmly began to fill her corn-cob pipe. Margaret went to the telephone.

"Martha Morton is not going to get away with this," Margaret said.

"That's right, Peg, you tell her where to get off," Mary O'Flaherty said encouragingly.

IV

Something had happened. The house was different. The grownups were quiet. They weren't fighting now. But the way they were quiet made him a little afraid.

"I wish I didn't come up here today," Bill said.

"Why, Bill?" Danny asked.

He was afraid Bill would go home. He wanted Bill to stay all night and sleep with him.

"I coulda had more fun playin' with the kids around my house in Hardin Square."

"We can play and have fun."

"What?" Bill asked contemptuously.

"We can play . . ." Danny paused, trying to think of some game to suggest. He couldn't think of any. Then he burst out, "Let's play casino."

"No," Bill said with finality. "I always beat you. You're too easy to beat at casino."

"I beat Uncle Al at casino before he went on the road."

"Aw, that's because he let you. When I was your age, Papa used to let me beat him at games. He didn't think I knew it but I did."

"How did you know it?"

"I knew it. When I tell you I know something, don't ask me why. Because I know. Say, when Papa tells me he knows something, do you think I ask him why?"

"Do you?"

"Not on your life. Because if Papa knows something, he knows it. If I know something, I know it."

A puzzled expression crossed Danny's face. He wanted to be grown up so he could know things like this. He wanted to ask Bill how he knew things that way, but he didn't. He didn't want Bill to get mad and go home.

"Let's play a baseball game."

"You don't know how to play. Heck, you don't even understand baseball."

"Tell me how. I know something about it."

"What do you know?"

"The batter."

"What about the batter?"

"He bats the ball and the catcher catches the ball."

"Do you think that makes you smart?"

He didn't want Bill to talk to him this way. It made him feel bad.

Bill's face suddenly lit up with interest.

"I got an idea," he said.

"What?" Danny asked, eagerly leaning forward to listen as they sat together on the parlor rug.

"Let's get Uncle Al's gun."

"We can't. They won't let us," Danny said uneasily.

"They don't have to know."

Danny was frightened. But he wanted to get the gun. He wanted to play with Bill and with Uncle Al's gun because it was a real gun, not a toy gun. He turned and looked behind him cautiously to see if anyone were looking or listening.

Excitement grew inside him. He wanted to do this.

"I know where Uncle Al keeps his gun," Bill said.

"I do, too. In his closet, on the shelf in the closet in his bedroom."

"I'll get it. You go and keep the lookout."

"What's that?"

"You watch. If any of them start to come you give me a signal."

Bill paused and thought for a moment.

"If any of them start to come to the front of the house so that they'll catch me, you pretend you're an Indian and you do Indian dances. Do you know how to?"

Danny jumped up and began dancing slowly around the room, shouting:

"Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!"

At this moment, Mary O'Flaherty appeared in the parlor.

"What in the name of Saint Anthony is going on?"

"I'm an Indian, I'm an Indian," Danny answered.

"It's all right so long as you're only an Indian. Sure and I thought something had happened to you, son."

She went back to the rear.

"You fathead, I ought to smack you one on the bean."

"What did I do?"

"I'm not going to do it now."

"Why?" Danny asked.

"You'll gum it up. I ought to give you a good swift kick in the pants."

"I won't gum it up. Honest, I won't."

"Why did you do it?"

"What did I do? Why did I do what, Bill?"

"Bring Mother in here by yelling."

"You asked me to."

Bill got up and stood over Danny with clenched fists.

"I ought to let you have one for sayin' that."

"You asked me if I knew how to act like an Indian. Bill, I was only trying to show you I do know how."

Bill walked off, a sulky expression on his face.

"I'm not going to do it."

"Please, Bill," Danny pleaded.

Bill didn't answer him.

"Please, Bill, play with me."

Bill shrugged his shoulders.

"Bill?"

"How do I know I can trust you?"

"You can, Bill."

"How do I know you won't gum up the works and get me in Dutch?"

"I won't, Bill. I won't get you in Dutch."

"Cross your heart and hope to die that you won't."

"Yes."

"Well, go ahead and do it."

Danny stared at Bill, bewildered.

"Well, do you want me to wait all day?"

"What do I do?"

"Cross your heart and hope to die."

Danny crossed his fingers over his breast.

"That don't count."

"Why? I did it."

"You didn't say it."

"What do I say?"

"Say what I say after me. Every word," Bill said contemptuously. "Say I cross my heart and hope to die . . ."

"I cross my heart and hope to die . . ."

"If I gum my brother up."

"If I gum my brother up."

Bill put his fist under Danny's nose.

"And this is what you'll get if you do. Get me?"

v

Bill crouched in a corner by the piano with a handkerchief over his face. Danny galloped into the parlor from the hall, yelling:

"Giddyap! Giddyap!"

"Now I got you," Bill said, jumping up.

He aimed Al's twenty-two revolver directly at Danny. Danny put his hands up and looked into the narrow mouth of the gun.

He wished he owned a real gun like that to play with.

"Now I got you and I'm gonna kill you—dead."

"Then can I kill you with the gun?"

"Shut up and get ready to bite the dust."

"Why do I have to bite the dust?"

"Because I'm gonna kill you dead. I'm Buffalo Bill. Now, Indian . . . put your hands up, Indian . . . over your head. High up over your head. Don't move!"

Danny obeyed his brother.

"One . . ." Bill said, continuing to level the real gun directly at Danny's head.

Danny wondered whether he ought to fall forward or backward. How did you fall down and die when you got shot with a bullet? He better not ask Bill, because Bill might get sore and bawl him out.

"Two . . ."

He wanted Bill to pull the trigger to hurry up, so he could fall down dead and then get up and shoot Bill.

"Get ready."

"I'm ready, Bill."

"Shut up, Indian . . ."

Danny waited, hands over his head.

He was glad he wasn't a real Indian, only a play Indian. He wouldn't want to be a real Indian.

"Aim . . ."

Bill scowled. He was trying to look like Papa. He would shoot him dead now.

"Fire."

Bill pulled the trigger. There was a click.

"Bang," Bill yelled.

Danny crumpled up and fell down, playing dead.

"One more red man bit the dust," Bill said.

Danny got up.

"Hey, you're dead."

"I know. But now it's my turn to shoot you. Now I'm Buffalo Bill and you're an Indian," Danny answered, reaching his hand out to get Uncle Al's revolver.

VI

Suppose there were real bullets in the gun. Then when he fired, the real bullets would shoot out of the gun. And there would be a big noise. Bigger than the noise of a cap gun. He wanted a cap gun. They said he couldn't have a cap gun because it was dangerous.

He was Buffalo Bill and Bill was an Indian and he was going to make Bill bite the dust now.

He knelt in a corner of the parlor, holding the revolver, aiming it toward the parlor entrance.

But Bill wasn't coming in. Bill had gone to the bathroom. He was staying in it a long time.

—Hurry up, Bill.

He felt the steel of the gun, looked at it. He touched the barrel with his right-hand index finger. The barrel was for the bullets. If there were bullets in the gun and you pulled the trigger and the bullets hit a person, that person would get

wounded or get killed, because it was a real gun and the real bullets would kill a person dead.

What was it like to be dead?

His eyes opened wide and he licked his lower lip.

He put the gun in his mouth and held his hand on the trigger. If he pulled the trigger and there was a real bullet, where would the bullet go when he pulled the trigger? Would it go down to his stomach and would it come out with his number two?

He closed his eyes and held his finger on the trigger.

The gun was cocked.

He pulled the trigger.

There was the click.

He took the gun out of his mouth and looked at it.

He sprawled out on the floor and aimed. He was waiting for a burglar. He must be quiet, hush-quiet so that the burglar couldn't hear him. He was going to shoot Mr. Burglar.

He heard Bill. Bill was Mr. Burglar. He waited.

Bill entered.

Danny aimed, squinted his eyes, pulled the trigger.

The gun clicked.

"Fall down dead. You're dead. I shot you dead," Danny called out, jumping up gaily and running to Bill, again aiming the gun and pulling the trigger.

"Bang," he shouted. "I killed you. You're a burglar."

"Gimme the gun. It's my turn."

"You didn't fall down and die."

"I'm dead. You had the gun. Now gimme it."

"But you didn't fall down dead and I did."

"Aw, shut up and gimme the gun. It's my turn."

He snatched the gun from Danny's hand.

"I won't do it either," Danny said.

"What won't you do?" Bill asked.

"Fall down dead when you shoot me."

"Don't and see if I care," Bill said.

Chapter Fifteen

I

DON'T you be thinking of doin' it," Mary O'Flaherty said to Louise.

"I can help you, Mother—I'm strong enough."

"Ah, just givin' a sweep of the carpet and a whisk of the broom over the house, sure and is that too hard? It's harder work than this that I've done in me day, harder work than that."

"But if it isn't so hard, Mother, then I can do it; I can help."

"It's a beautiful day. You go sit in the sun. I don't want you to be getting the dust in you while I sweep," Mary O'Flaherty said.

She turned and looked through the dusty dining-room window at the sunny day outside.

"Pa, Pa," Mary O'Flaherty called commandingly.

They heard Old Tom hurrying to the dining room from the parlor.

"Pa! Pa!" Mary O'Flaherty repeated insistently.

"What in the name of God is it you're after wantin' of me now?" he asked.

"Put a chair in the yard for me daughter Louise to sit in the sun."

"That I'll do, and then what is it you'll be wantin' of me?"

"Hurry. I want me daughter to get the sun. It's a beautiful day out."

"I'll get my own chair," Louise said.

"Don't think of it, me girl, don't think of it. 'Tis nothin' at all for me to do," Old Tom told her.

"Pa, Peg was out again with that married man," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"What's that you're after tellin' me, Mary?"

"She came home at all hours of the night."

"Which chair will it be?" Old Tom asked, looking softly at Louise.

"Give her that rocking chair, Pa. Put it in the sun."

"I heard you, Mary."

II

She could feel the sun on her hair and face. She rocked and squinted her eyes at the sky and the sun. The sky was so blue. How far away was it? And the clouds. They were white, as if they had just come from the laundry and had been washed clean. The way they moved in the sky, floating overhead so peacefully. It must be very quiet in the sky. Floating like a cloud in the sky must be like sleeping. Sometimes when she was falling asleep at night she would feel as if she were floating into some place where it was so peaceful and where there was such sweet and heavenly quiet. Dreams seemed to float through your mind like clouds floated through the sky. That big white cloud like an island, floating over her head, right above her. It was like a dream.

Louise closed her eyes for a moment.

She wanted to dream.

She felt as if she were far away from where she was, as if the buildings and the little noises she heard were farther away from her than they were. A door slammed. A horse and wagon, the horse cl'oppety-clopping in the alley on her left. Her attention was fixed on the sounds made by the horse and wagon, the hoofs striking the bricks in the alley, the wheels rolling over them. The horse and wagon went on. Its sounds drifted away as it went toward Forty-eighth Street.

She opened her eyes. For a few seconds it seemed to her as if she had been far away from this small, rectangular back yard.

She rocked slowly.

How much better this all was than the way they'd lived when she'd been a girl! They'd been crowded then. And yet it hadn't been so bad for her as for the others, because she was younger, and Al had started to advance. She'd been the most favored of all of them. What had she been favored for?

She looked up at the sky again. She stared at it as if she wanted to be up there in the sky, as if happiness were as big and as far away from her as the sky.

Yes, why had she been favored and what for?

These days they kept telling her to rest. Rest, rest for what?

"Are you gettin' a nice rest out here in the sun?"

It was Father. She'd heard the back door close, and she'd heard his footsteps on the wooden stairs, but she hadn't paid attention to it.

"Oh, yes, Father."

"Your mother's workin' away like a fury on the house and I told meself, I says to meself, 'It'll be more peaceful to smoke a pipeful out here in the back yard.' 'Tis a glorious day, Louise, me girl, a glorious day."

"Yes, Pa, it is."

"Oh, a glorious day just to sit in the sun."

That was all her father seemed to want now—to sit in the sun and have peace. She envied him. But he was old and she was young. She was too young just to want to sit in the sun like this. She had a life to live.

Shreds of tobacco slipped through Old Tom's fingers as he fumblingly filled his well-used cornob pipe. Louise watched him idly. His fingers were short and thick, and she noticed the nicotine stains on them. His hands were workworn, and the prominent veins were becoming deep purple.

He was wearing dark, baggy, spotted trousers and a khaki shirt open at the neck. What had he looked like when he was young? She couldn't remember. She couldn't imagine what he had looked like as a young man. She remembered him as though he'd always been gray-haired, even when she

was a little girl. He must have been nearly fifty when she was born.

His pipe filled, Old Tom pushed his crumpled package of Tip Top Tobacco into his trouser pocket, stuck the pipe in his mouth, pulled a wooden match out of another pocket, struck it on the seat of his trousers, and, capping a hand over the bowl of his pipe, leaned forward and lit it.

Another wagon passed in the alley.

Louise noticed his gray whiskers.

He puffed, took the pipe out of his mouth, and stared at the sky.

"Yes, 'tis a glorious day," he muttered.

"It is."

She felt shy with her father. Funny, how little they had to say to each other. Still she liked being with him. She was glad he'd come out in the yard.

"Sometimes, of a fine day like this one, I'd be workin' in the field with me father—in the old country."

He put his pipe back into his mouth and puffed again. It had gone out. He fumbled and fussed and used three matches lighting it.

An ice wagon passed in the alley.

"I'd listen to the birds. There's more birds in the old country than there is out here in America. Did you know that?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, there is. Ah, it's full of birds. Many a time, when I was a young boy, I'd listen to 'em singing."

It was then that he'd been in love with her mother. She tried to picture the two of them, young and in love in Ireland. Her mind went blank. It was as if her mother and father could never have been young.

"I'd hear them singing, and it's little I'd think of America. Ah, in them days America was far away. Sure, we'd hear tell of it, and of how there was jobs aplenty and money. Why,

you'd hear tell of America as if in America the money grew on trees."

He puffed on his pipe. Sometimes he was like this, remembering and missing his past.

She wanted to talk to him, say things to him. Say things to him when she didn't know what they were.

"Tom," Mary O'Flaherty called from the back porch.

"I'm only smokin' my pipe," he called apologetically to her.

"I was just wantin' to know where you were."

She stood against the railing looking at them. Then she went back into her kitchen.

A junk man was mournfully droning out:

"Ragsoliron."

His horse was slowly going by. He kept repeating his cry, and each time it seemed to be more mournful.

"Ragsoliron."

"What time is it Al's coming home?" Old Tom asked.

"Not until sometime tomorrow morning."

"Oh, you don't say. Sure, I thought it was today. Where is he coming from?"

"Detroit."

"Detroit, where is that?"

"It's in Michigan."

"So it is. In Michigan. Sure, I knew that, but it slipped me mind that I knew it. Does something ever slip your mind, me girl?"

"Yes, everybody forgets sometimes, Father," she answered, smiling.

"So they do."

The cry of the junk man still sounding so mournful floated in from the alley.

"Where's the boy?" Old Tom asked.

"He's playing out front, I guess," she answered.

She wished there were something to do, even though she liked it sitting here in the sun with her father.

Old Tom knocked the ashes out of his pipe, tapping it against the wooden fence behind him. He looked about the yard rapidly, nervously moving his head and blinking his eyes. He muttered an indistinguishable sound.

"What did you say, Father?"

"Was I sayin' something?"

"I don't know. I thought you were."

"That junk man, nobody is sellin' anything to him today," Old Tom said.

"I guess not," Louise said.

Her father was like this with her so often, and she would just close up, too, and begin to think that she ought to talk to him, say things, but she didn't know what she ought to say. Sometimes she would think of how maybe he wouldn't live long, and she was afraid that maybe he would die before she said something to him that she ought to say, only she didn't exactly know how to put it into words. It was that she loved him and wanted him to know that she loved him, only she couldn't say that. And he seemed . . . he seemed shy. It was funny to think of your father as being shy, but he seemed that way.

He was looking at her, and his eyes were so tender, his look so sweet. Poor Father. Maybe it hurt him, too, knowing that she was sick.

"I was talkin' to me friend, Tim McGurrah, the day before yesterday, and he was tellin' me of a friend of his, a man by the name of McClosky, who was retired. His children told him to stop workin', and this man McClosky, he ups and gets himself a job as a night watchman. Me friend, Tim—he's a County Kerry man, but don't be tellin' that to your mother because she don't like Kerry men—Tim, he tells me that this friend of his, McClosky, likes his work as a night watchman. It's peaceful work, Tim McGurrah tells me he says."

Louise looked at her father. How could she tell him she understood?

—Oh, I never want to grow old, she told herself.

III

Louise was a good girl, a fine girl, but she wouldn't understand an old man like himself, even if she was his daughter. She was American. He wasn't American, no more than Mary was. And the jokes they used to make at their expense.

—Pa, do you think you'll ever go back?

—Mother, do you think you'll ever go back?

Go back. Not a day passed that he wasn't thinking of the old country.

—No, and be damned, I'll never go back.

And what could he be wanting now, at his age, with his pains, but to be buried in the sod itself, alongside of his mother and father? And for Mary, when her time came, to be laid beside him?

Maybe his daughters understood him more than his sons, and maybe it was Margaret who understood him the best of all. This one, ah, she was a baby still, one of his babies. But to think that there she was, a beauty, with the sun shining in that thick hair of hers, and she was his own flesh and blood, and Mary's own flesh and blood. It was a mystery indeed.

He gazed up at the sky.

Ah, yes, children being born and growing up was as mysterious as the sky. And the sky. It was over Ireland, and if you were able to fly up there and to look down, you could look down on the old country.

His eyes were wide open, and his head turned as he gazed in awe at the sky.

"Not a sign of rain in the heavens," he commented idly.

"No, Father, there isn't."

"Weather like this is good for me old bones," he went on.

"Yes," Louise remarked dreamily.

This one, she was different from the other two. Dreamy, she was. The other two, they were grown now, women they were, but this one was only a girl and dreamy. Ah, what dreams

were filling her head? Love and the fellows, was this what would be filling her head with dreams?

There was a thing or two he could tell her, a thing or two he could be telling the world, but how was he to be telling it to a girl, even his own daughter?

He idly scratched his head.

"Louise, I was askin' meself the other day . . ."

"Yes, Father?"

"I was askin' meself—might the day ever come when they'll be flying these airplanes and balloons from here all of the way to Ireland?"

"Why, no, Father, not that far."

"I don't think they will, meself, but there's been wonders in the world in me own lifetime. And there'll be more wonders still to see and behold. Sure, when I was your age, if a man came to me and said the day would come when there would be horseless carriages, I swear, upon my word, I would have believed him mad; mad indeed."

At this moment Danny, shouting and whooping, bolted into the yard.

"What are you up to now?" Old Tom asked Danny.

Louise smiled at him wistfully.

Ignoring his grandfather, he ran up to Aunt Louise.

"Aunt Louise, take me downtown to the Loop."

"Oh, I can't today."

"Take me to the duckpond."

"Isn't there something for you to be playin' around here?" Old Tom asked him.

"I want to feed the ducks."

If the boy asked Mary, she'd be telling him to take the child to the park. And that's what his being a retired gentleman meant, being turned into a nursemaid.

—Dad, you are a retired gentleman.

That's what his oldest son Al said to him.

"The ducks have plenty to eat," Old Tom said.

"I like to feed the ducks."

"You do, Danny boy?" Louise asked him.

"Quack, quack, quack," Danny shouted at the top of his voice, running around and around Aunt Louise's rocking chair.

Martha Morton suddenly appeared on her back porch. Her hair was disheveled and she was wearing a soiled bathrobe.

—Go on, you harlot! Old Tom said silently.

"What's going on?" she called down angrily.

Louise looked up, troubled, not wanting to have words with her.

"Quack, quack, quack," Danny shouted, continuing to circle the rocking chair and ignoring Martha Morton.

"He's the noisiest boy in the whole neighborhood," Martha Morton said loudly.

"He's only a child," Louise called up.

"You could teach him some manners. If he doesn't stop making so much noise, I'll call the cops."

—Call the cops on yourself, you old biddy, Old Tom said under his breath.

Danny stopped in his tracks and looked up at Martha Morton.

Suddenly appearing on her back porch, Mary O'Flaherty called out:

"Who's callin' the cops on me grandson? Pa, biff that one, biff her in the nose or I'll do it meself."

"Let me tell you a story, Danny boy," Aunt Louise said quietly to Danny.

Danny wasn't listening. He hoped there would be a fight. He wanted to see them all biff that Mrs. Morton.

"That boy's father is six feet tall, and I'll get him after you if you say a word against him. Six feet tall," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"You're all greenhorns," Martha Morton shouted.

She turned around and slammed the kitchen door of her apartment as she went back inside.

"Son, you play the way you want," Mary O'Flaherty called out.

"Don't you want me to tell you a story, Danny boy?" Louise asked.

Again he paid no attention to Aunt Louise. He stared, absorbed, at the Morton porch.

"If ever I saw a limb of the devil, it's that redheaded one," Old Tom said.

"Aunty Louise."

"Yes, darling."

"What's a greenhorn?"

"She was just mean to say that."

"Father, why are you and Mother called greenhorns?" Danny asked.

Old Tom was hurt. He said nothing for a moment. Then he said:

"She's no good, that one."

Mary O'Flaherty came down the steps and, birdlike, moved on the grass.

"Greenhorn! Greenhorn!" she cried, dancing an Irish jig.

She flung her dress in the air, her face lifted to the Morton porch.

"I'll greenhorn you, you whore out of the fires of Hell."

Again she flung her dress in the air.

"Mother, the neighbors are looking," Louise said, burning with shame.

The empty porches on either side of the building had become filled with peeling women.

"Let them know about that Morton one! The curse of God on her unholy head."

Mary O'Flaherty turned to Danny.

"Son, take no notice of them. Go play and have a good time."

"Yes, Mother."

He was bewildered. He stood gazing from one to the other.

"Mary, she's not worth speakin' of," Old Tom said.

"If I was young, I'd fix her. If I was a man, I'd beat her black and blue. May God strike her dead this minute."

"Mother, she's gone inside now."

"Come, son, and I'll give you a glass of milk for your little stomach."

She took his hand and led him into the house.

Louise got up, still flushed with shame, and followed them.

And muttering to himself while the neighbors watched, Old Tom picked up the rocking chair and slowly carried it inside.

IV

Louise looked out of the parlor window. The sun was mellowing. People were beginning to come home from work. To-day was ending, and that part of today that was gone would never come back. Where did it go to? Once as a little girl she remembered how she had asked her father where does a second go when it ticks away, and her father had scratched his head and asked, where did it go to? And she would like to think that the seconds didn't go away forever, never to come back again, just as sometimes she would like to think that her childhood wasn't just gone and over with forever but that it was put away somewhere, like in some hope chest, and you could sometime get it out of that hope chest and look at it and have it back again.

There were the people coming home from work. When you worked you didn't feel sad about the day ending, because when you were finished with your work it was like you were coming back to yourself after being away from yourself.

"Louise, play the song about the door without any keys," Mary O'Flaherty said as she came into the parlor.

"Yes, girl, play us an Irish song." Old Tom said, joining them.

Louise sat down at the piano.

"I don't think I know that song, Mother."

"Oh, sure you know it. Didn't you play it for me? The song about the door without any key and the old-County Down. I like it even if it isn't me own county."

"Oh, yes," Louise said.

"Tom, the door without any key " Mary said mearingly.

"Yes, Mary," Tom said.

They looked at each other. In the meeting of their eyes lay their entire life together.

Louise began to play. Their memories permeated the little parlor. They were in the parlor and they were in the past, and listening to the song they were listening to the music of their own memories, the sad music of their own lives.

Shyly, Old Tom stole a glance at Mary.

Louise began to sing now as she played. Her voice was soft and pure. Tom looked at her back and nodded his head slowly.

She stopped. For a moment all three were silent, and their silence mingled with their memories and weighed down the little parlor.

"Play us another song, girl, play us *The Last Rose of Summer*," Old Tom said.

"That's a lovely one, Father." Louise began to play.

"It makes me think of when I was a lad, Mary," Old Tom said.

v

Danny walked slowly into the parlor and stared curiously at Aunt Louise.

"What's the matter, Danny boy?"

"Nothing."

He looked off.

"There's your picture," he said, as though something was weighing on his mind. He pointed at the framed photograph of Louise set on top of the piano.

"Yes."

She watched him walk about the room, so charming, so

fresh. She repressed a smile as he turned to stare at her with a penetrating, questioning gaze.

"Aunty Louise?" he asked earnestly.

"Yes, Danny boy?"

"Aunty Louise, can I ask you a question?"

"Of course you can. What is it?"

"Aunty Louise, what did the stork look like?"

"What stork?"

"The stork. The stork that brought me."

"Why, it looked like a stork."

"Did you see the stork that was bringing me?"

"Why, no. I wasn't there."

"Where were you?"

"Oh, I don't remember."

"What color was the stork?"

"White—I guess."

"Why did the stork bring me to my mother instead of to you?"

She was confused and embarrassed. As a little girl she had wondered about the stork, too. And she had to be careful because her nephew was a smart little boy, and if she weren't careful he'd catch her in a lie. These questions, with his blue eyes focused on her, made her feel nervous.

"But if the stork wanted to, he could have brought me to you or to Mother instead of Mama, couldn't he?"

"I guess so—except I'm not married."

"But you could have got married."

"But then I couldn't marry you when you grow up, and you say you want to marry me."

"I do."

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"You could get a divorce."

"Why, Danny, where did you hear about that?" she asked, surprised.

"I heard Mrs. Morton tell Aunty Peg in the hall one day that she thought she would get a divorce from Mr. Mor-

ton. I'm glad the stork didn't bring any children to her."

"Why, Danny boy?"

"Because she doesn't like children."

"Little boys shouldn't talk like that."

He kept staring at her.

"Why didn't the stork bring me to you, Aunty Louise?"

"I suppose God tells the stork who to bring children to."

"Where do the storks live?"

Louise was flustered. She didn't know what to say.

"I suppose the storks that bring babies live in Heaven."

"Are they different from other storks? Like being special storks?" Danny asked.

"I guess so."

"And there are other storks that don't bring babies?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"What do they do?"

"What do they do? I . . . guess they do what all storks do . . . I don't know much about the storks."

"And Heaven is up, way up the other side of the sky, isn't it, Aunty Louise?"

"I think so. It's far away."

"It's an awful long trip for the stork to be carrying a baby all the way from Heaven."

In agitation she asked herself, Did Danny know? Was he asking these questions because he knew?

"Aunty Louise?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't it get tired?"

"Doesn't what get tired?"

"The stork."

"Why should it get tired?"

She was calmer now.

"—rying, nying all that way from Heaven way down here to where we are and carrying a baby. I couldn't lift my baby brother Dennis, and don't I weigh more than the stork?"

"I guess God doesn't make the stork tired . . . just like . . . just like the reindeers that take Santa Claus at Christmas don't get tired."

"Oh," Danny exclaimed.

"Goodness, Danny boy, how did you happen to think of all those questions?"

"I don't know," Danny said in a vague way. "And, Auntie Louise, is it the same stork?"

"The same stork? How do you mean, the same stork?"

She looked bewildered.

"The same stork that takes all of the babies."

"Yes," she answered quickly and with an air of knowingness.

His questions were beginning to tire her. She wished he would stop.

"No babies can come and be brought down to where we are, the earth, if the stork gets sick."

Louise smiled.

—What was she smiling at? Why did grownups smile when you asked them important questions?

"The stork doesn't get sick," she said.

"Is it God—God keeps the stork not sick?"

"Yes."

"Why doesn't God keep us not sick like the stork?" he asked.

"That's the way God wants it to be. He knows more than we do."

Danny thought about this. Then suddenly he turned and ran out of the parlor.

Chapter Sixteen

I

MOTHER," Margaret called excitedly as she let herself in at the front door.

"Yes, Peg, what is it?" Mary O'Flaherty replied from the dining room.

"Father Costello committed suicide!" Margaret said breathlessly.

Mary O'Flaherty was stunned. Then she said:

"Read what the newspaper says about it, Peg."

"I'm taking my hat off—I'll read it to you right away."

"What's the matter, Peg?" Louise asked, rushing out of the bathroom.

"It's on the front page of the newspapers. He turned on the gas in the parish house."

"God have mercy on his soul."

"What's that you're after sayin', Peg?" Old Tom asked, hurrying into the dining room.

"Tom, Father Costello turned on the gas and he's dead," Mary O'Flaherty said.

After a pause, Tom said:

"You don't say."

"Read it to me, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said as Peg entered the dining room.

"It was only last Sunday he said eight o'clock mass," Old Tom said, scratching his head.

"I went to confession to him just about three weeks ago," Louise said.

"A priest of God," Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed.

"You say he turned on the gas?" Old Tom asked.

"It's a sin. A sin against God. And him a holy man of God. Turning on the gas with his anointed fingers, a holy man of God. Why, you'd think his arm would wither when he did it!" Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed.

"Mary, it was the drink. Sure, the whole parish knows of the way the drink was the weakness of poor Father Costello," Old Tom explained.

"God's curse will be on him, that's sure indeed," Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed. "I can't wait till me daughter Lizz hears this. I wonder what she'll say?"

"What happened?" Danny asked innocently, appearing at the entrance to the dining room and staring at them with curiosity.

"Shh, son, run off and play," Mary O'Flaherty told him.

Danny noticed how they all listened to Aunt Margaret read, like they didn't want to miss a word. He heard, too. He couldn't understand it all. It was about how Father Costello killed himself by turning on the gas. That meant that he had made himself dead. They always told him not to play with the gas stove.

Margaret looked up from the newspaper. No one spoke for a moment. Their faces were solemn.

"It's a tragedy," Margaret said.

"It's a sin against God, a sin against God, and he'll never be buried on holy ground," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"What did he do that was bad? Why was it bad?" Danny asked.

His question surprised them. They all turned to stare at Danny.

"This isn't for his ears," Mary O'Flaherty said.

It was grown-up talk, and about something bad. He wasn't supposed to hear it, but he wanted to just the same.

"I know what you're all talking about. Father Costello at the church killed himself. He turned on the gas and the gas killed him," Danny said proudly.

"Go on and play. What do you want to be hearin' this for?" Old Tom said.

Aunt Louise turned frightened eyes on Danny.

"Little Brother, why don't you run in the parlor and play?" Margaret asked.

"I don't want to. I want to hear you read more," he answered.

"We want to have grown-up talk, Little Brother. It won't interest you."

"Oh, yes it will, Aunt Peg."

Aunt Margaret and Aunt Louise both laughed.

"No, go on and play," Old Tom said gruffly.

"Danny boy, you run in the front and build something with your blocks. We're talking about things that aren't for little boys. Go ahead and then I'll do something with you. I'll do anything you want me to," Aunt Louise said.

Danny stared at Aunt Louise as if he didn't believe her.

Reluctantly he turned and walked slowly through the dim hallway. By the front door he stopped to look back. They were all watching him, checking up on him to see if he were listening.

II

"Ah, he's a smart little fellow. That's what I said the first time I laid eyes on me little grandson. I said he has the look of a wise one about him, that's what I said," Mary O'Flaherty commented. "But he's too innocent to be hearing talk about suicides."

"Children are all alike. They're curious," Margaret said.

"Curiosity killed the cat," Mary O'Flaherty said authoritatively.

Old Tom looked solemnly at the women of his family, one after the other.

"Ah, 'twill be a blow to me friend Father Hunt."

"Did Father Hunt ever say anything about Father Costello, Father?" Margaret asked.

"No, nary a word."

"A priest is a holy man," Mary O'Flaherty said, "and he has no right to do it. It's a sin against God that God will never forgive. And if he has a poor old mother somewhere, what will she do? His poor mother, she'll die of a broken heart. The poor man. It was the drink that did it."

"He must have been an unhappy man," Margaret said moodily in a half whisper.

"I wonder if he suffered or if he went quick?"

Surprised and fearful, Louise stared at Margaret.

"Well, 'tis a pity. A pity it is," Old Tom said dolefully.

"He should have been watched and not let do it. It will scandalize the people, and think of what the Protestants will say of it," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"I think that he was once sent away to take a cure, a Keely cure," Margaret said.

"Ah, sometimes of a Sunday morning the poor man would be on the altar of God and he wouldn't walk straight sayin' the holy mass, and I'd be seein' him now and again on the street, and drunk he would be," Old Tom said, shaking his head slowly from side to side.

"It will break the heart of poor Father Fitzpatrick," Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed.

"He's too strict," Margaret interrupted.

"Why shouldn't he be?" Mary O'Flaherty snapped back.

Louise was upset. This news of poor Father Costello—she wished that he hadn't done it. He'd been nice in confession and never got cross with her in them ~~those few times when~~ she'd gone to him, and his sermons were never too long. But she couldn't remember much of what he ever said.

Yes, she wished that he hadn't done it. But now it was too late. Sometime it would be too late for everybody.

This thought frightened Louise.

III

Grownups had all kinds of things they talked about that a boy wasn't supposed to hear. Suicide was grown-up talk just like money was. And some of the things the grownups fought about, these were grown-up talk.

Standing in the parlor, Danny could hear the murmur of their whispering voices. He suddenly went to stand before the parlor mirror.

"Pss, pss, pss."

He stuck his lips out and made whispering sounds, watching his image in the mirror with fascination.

"Pss! Pss! Pssss!"

He laughed.

He turned and gazed at the parlor ceiling.

—What was death?

He lay down on the floor and tried to be perfectly still.

"Why, Danny, what are you doing?" Aunt Louise asked, coming into the parlor.

"Don't talk to me. I'm dead."

"Why do you want to play that for, Danny?"

"I'm dead. Aren't you sorry?"

She didn't answer. It bothered her, seeing Danny lying like this on the floor.

"Aunt Louise, why did Father Costello die?" Danny asked, getting up.

"I don't know," she answered dejectedly.

"Why can't we have to die?"

She didn't answer him immediately. He looked up at her with such trust in his wide blue eyes.

"I don't know," she said slowly.

"If I was God I'd never let you die, Auntie Louise."

She touched his curly head and gazed off at the curtains. She mustn't cry. She mustn't let herself cry.

"Why?" she asked him in a soft, low voice.

"Because I love you, Auntie Louise."

On the way to his room Old Tom saw her holding the little fellow. Wouldn't they ever stop fussing over the boy?

—It's a mollicoddle they'll be making out of him, he thought.

Louise released Danny and stood up.

"When I grow up to be a man, I want to marry you, Auntie Louise."

"You don't want to talk like that," she answered impatiently.

Danny looked up at her, hurt with the crossness he heard in her voice. He kept looking at her, as if waiting for her to say something.

She couldn't talk. She couldn't tell him. But she couldn't tell him—what? She didn't know.

Oh, when he grew up would she even be alive?

She put her hand on his head, but he drew back.

"You do love me, don't you, little Danny?"

His answer shocked her.

"You don't love me," he said.

IV

"When my Jim came home with the newspaper telling about poor Father Costello, I just had to come and see you, Mother. I told Jim that I was going to see my mother. She would need me," Lizz explained, sitting at the dining-room table drinking tea with Margaret and Mary O'Flaherty.

She was sloppily dressed and her black hair was mussed. Her abdomen protruded. She was pregnant.

"He was a black sheep," Mary O'Flaherty commented.

"But, Mother, wasn't he your favorite priest at Crucifixion Church?" Lizz asked.

"In a pig's eye he was," Mary O'Flaherty answered sharply.

"Why, Mother, I thought that you worshiped Father Costello and always went to him to confession."

"Me, me mother's daughter, me, sister of a holy nun, a virgin of God, go to him to confess me sins with him bringing

the smell of booze into the sacred confession box? Not me, not me who was Mary Fox before I met your father."

"Now, I thought you worshiped Father Costello."

"A sacrilege, a sacrilege it was," Mary O'Flaherty said in a voice of contempt.

"Oh, Mother, don't be so hard on the poor man's memory. He's dead now," Margaret said.

Mary O'Flaherty pounded her fist on the dining-room table and proclaimed:

"I'm like this table."

—Ignorant Irish, Margaret thought as she walked out of the room.

"I'm not your black sheep, Mother," Lizz said.

"How's your long-legged pauper?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"Oh, Mother, my Jim is a good man. And he likes you. He's always talking of you. Why, the day hardly passes that he doesn't say, my Jim—I wonder how your mother is Lizz?"

"He does, does he?"

"Yes, Mother, he does."

"Well do I remember the first day you brought him to me house. I was lookin' out of the window, and I see him coming along the street, and I says to meself—'Is that the best she can get?'"

"Your other daughters haven't gotten anything," Lizz said.

"You leave me out of this," Margaret called from the hallway.

"I won't be insulted," Lizz said in indignation.

"Insulted—why, of all the nerve! You won't be insulted," Margaret called from the hallway.

"Yes, you heard me."

"You, insulted!" Margaret came back into the dining room. "You've always insulted me. You, you always were the troublemaker in this family. We never had peace until you got

out. Well, you got out. You made your bed. Go home and stink in it."

"Say, you!" Lizz screamed, getting to her feet.

"What in the name of God are ye all up to, screamin' and shoutin' and raisin' the roof like barbarians and savages. Insulted!" Old Tom paused at the entrance to the dining room. "Insulted—ah, be quiet the lot of ye."

"Father, she insulted me."

"Don't hide behind your sick old father," Margaret shouted at her older sister.

Old Tom looked from one to the other of his daughters.

"Ah, and I wish to God that Adam never had a rib," he said.

v

The house was quiet again.

"Of course I knew the Costellos," Lizz said. "His father ran a saloon on the North Side, and his sister married a second cousin of the McDavitts who lived on Archer Avenue."

"Who were they, Lizz?" Margaret asked, her quarrel with her sister forgotten.

"You don't remember the McDavitts?"

"No, I don't think I do."

"Their people came from Dublin. And, oh, do they think they're fancy! And they and the Costellos—were they fancy because there was a priest in the family!"

Lizz rose and raised her chin. Her beautiful eyes sparkled. She was delighted with all this and was enjoying herself ~~now~~ end.

"A priest in the family. They were too good for Archer Avenue and the North Side and the city of Chicago."

"You don't say?" Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed, completely absorbed in this gossip.

"Mother," Lizz said knowingly, "Mother, he never should have become a priest in the first place. It was his mother. She wanted a son a priest."

"Ah, the poor woman, it's bitter tears she's shedding tonight. It's vinegar and gall she's drinking now. And the curse of God will be on any child that makes a poor old mother drink vinegar and gall. Ah, me heart goes out to her."

"I suppose she was ignorant and superstitious and drove the poor man into the priesthood against his will," Margaret said.

"If he had the call, Mother, he wouldn't be lying cold in an undertaking parlor tonight. He did it for old Mrs. Costello," Lizz said.

"You could always see that he was unhappy, Mother. A happy man doesn't drink the way he does and kill himself," Margaret said, talking as though to convince herself.

Lizz raised her right arm dramatically and proclaimed loudly:

"Pride goes before a fall."

"Maybe it was the will of God because his mother pushed him into being a priest," Margaret said.

"Oh, no, no. God would never do that," Lizz said. "God would never make anyone turn on the gas and commit suicide. God wouldn't do that."

"Ah, what's the world coming to?" Mary O'Flaherty bemoaned, wagging her head.

Old Tom came into the room.

"Give me a pinch of tobacco for me pipe, Tom," Mary said as Tom sat down at the table and fiddled with filling his corn-cob.

He handed his package of Tip Top across the table to Mary. He lit up, took a few puffs, and blew out the smoke.

"Well," he exclaimed with a twinkle in his eyes, "well, have the three of ye buried the poor priest yet?"

"Oh, Father, we were just talking," Margaret said.

"That I know. So I told mese'f, I'll come out and sit in on the burial of Father Costello."

"Mother, are you going to the funeral?" Lizz asked.

"Indeed I'm not."

"Oh, I wouldn't miss it for anything. I want to see who goes and how he's laid out."

"I wouldn't be seen dead at it," Mary said.

"I tell you, Mary," Tom said, "the divil himself won't keep you away from this one."

VI

It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

"I don't know why Lizz comes up here to be wastin' me time. She kept me up till all hours last night talking and chewing the rag," Mary O'Flaherty complained as Margaret sat in the kitchen drinking coffee.

"I can't stand that talk of hers," Margaret said.

"Sure, and what interest have I in it? And why should I be caring about the Monaghans and all the other Irish she tells me about? Not one of them she talked about is from me own county of Westmeath."

"If she wouldn't come up here with all that talk of hers, we could have a peaceful home and a peaceful family," Margaret said.

"Ah, the poor thing. Here, Peg, let me get you another cup of coffee before you go to work."

Danny stood watching, listening with interest. He'd been playing in the dining room but now he was just standing between the dining room and the kitchen. He wanted to hear the grownups talk about Mama.

"And she won't dress up. Where does she get that from? Mother, you're neat. She doesn't get it from any of us."

"It might be from your father's people," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"God, she looks like a washerwoman, coming up looking the way she does," Margaret went on as her mother set a cup of coffee before her.

A washerwoman was different from someone like Auntie Peg and Auntie Louise and Mother. Mama was like a washerwoman.

"The poor thing, with all those little ones and that long jaw of a husband of hers not earning enough money to support them. God pity her."

"She made her own bed," Margaret said.

Danny was bewildered. He didn't understand all they were saying. But they didn't like Mama and they were talking about her and saying she was a washerwoman. A washerwoman was someone you ought to be ashamed of if she was in your own family.

"She's ignorant. She isn't modern," Margaret said.

"Ah, and she's caught again," Mary O'Flaherty said. And then, suddenly noticing Danny and motioning toward him, she added in a low voice, "Peg, Peg."

Danny ran off to the parlor.

What did they mean, that Mama was caught?

What did she get caught at? What did she do to get caught?

Chapter Seventeen

I

WHY didn't you come in and go to the bathroom?"

"I don't know."

"You're too big to do things like that," Uncle Al said.

Danny didn't answer.

He felt bad.

He had stayed in the yard and let the two come in his pants. The two was warm. He had known he was doing two in his pants and that it was bad and you weren't supposed to do two in your pants when you were five going on six.

"Why didn't you come in and go to the bathroom?" Uncle Al asked.

"Ah; what are you plaguin' the little fellow for?" Old Tom asked.

"I'm not plaguing him. I'm interrogating him," Al said. He looked at Danny.

"Why did you do it?"

"I don't know," Danny said dully.

He didn't want to talk about it. He wished Father could make Uncle Al stop asking him questions.

It was bad not coming in and going to the bathroom. It was bad to stand in the yard and play with the two in his pants, and he was a bad boy.

"That's not right—it's wrong, Little Brother. Don't you know that it's wrong?" Margaret said.

"Yes."

"Sure, he never did anything like that before, not since he came to live with us," Mary O'Flaherty said, standing at the edge of the dining room.

He knew they were mad at him because he'd done this bad thing. But grownups didn't know. They didn't understand that he didn't want to go inside and go to the toilet. The number two just came.

He looked at them sullenly.

It was dark out now, and he was cleaned up and in his pajamas. He liked having pajamas. Uncle Al bought them for him. Uncle Al wore pajamas. Father wore a nightgown. His papa wore a nightgown. Mother and Aunt Peg and Aunt Louise wore nightgowns. He wished it wasn't dark. He wanted it to be light and to be back in the yard. He had been in the yard, looking at the sky and telling himself the sun was going away from the world, far away off in the sky, when he did two in his pants. He was looking at the sky and the sun. He wanted to be in the yard looking at the sky right now.

"It's not right, Little Brother, it's nasty to do number two in your pants."

Danny remained silent.

"Promise you won't do it again?" Uncle Al said.

—Fine lot he knows about children, Old Tom said to himself.

"Yes," Danny answered.

"That's it—be a regular fellow. A regular fellow doesn't do that. He goes to the bathroom," Uncle Al said.

Aunt Louise came into the dining room. He was glad she hadn't heard them talking this way to him. He didn't want them to tell her.

"I'm sleepy," Danny said.

"You go to bed and I'll tuck you in, you little darling," said Aunt Margaret.

He looked appealingly at Aunt Louise.

Rubbing his eyes, he walked out of the room. Aunt Margaret followed him.

He wanted Aunt Louise to tuck him in and kiss him good night, but he didn't want to ask her. He wanted to stand in

the back yard and watch the sky and see the sun far away in the sky, going out of the world.

He had been bad.

II

She wanted to let herself break down and cry, cry her heart and her eyes out. She wasn't crying because her brother Al was here. She couldn't cry with Al around.

"I tell you, Al, it's that typewriting that's made her sick," Mary O'Flaherty said, joining them in the parlor.

"No, it didn't," Al answered decisively.

Louise knew that she would have to do whatever her brother Al said. As far back as she could remember, she had always done what he said.

"You won't be too lonely, Louise darling," Margaret told her.

"I don't want to go," Louise said desperately.

"We want you to be our healthy and fair countess," Al said.

Al would tell her to go. She would have to go. And the idea of going frightened her. When she was a little girl she sometimes used to be afraid that if she went to sleep she might never wake up. If she went away to Denver now, she was afraid that she might never come back. She couldn't get out of her mind that going to Denver was the end and that she would die there. She had kept trying to keep this thought out of her mind, to forget it and to go on from day to day as if she wasn't going. But all along she had known, when she was forgetting it and keeping it out of her mind, that she would have to go. And all her unspoken dreams would never come true. They kept saying that she was a beautiful girl, and talked of her lovely auburn hair, and sometimes she believed them. But why was she a beautiful girl if . . . if this was going to happen to her? Why had God made her the kind of a girl they all said she was if she was going to be sick and was going to have to go away and never come back? What was never? What did never mean?

Yes, what did it mean to say never, never come back, never live her dreams?

"You're going to see some beautiful scenery, Countess. You can see Pikes Peak, and Echo Lake. You want to be sure and eat venison steak when you see Echo Lake," Al said, his voice cheerful and hearty.

Louise nodded.

What good would the scenery do her? She had always been told what to do. They were telling her what to do now. Al was telling her, but it was Peg's idea, too. And she would have to go.

"It's going to be so good for you, Louise darling. You'll come back a different girl," Margaret said.

"You'll come back with beautiful red roses on your cheeks," Al said.

She shook her head but said nothing. They had decided and told her that she was going and hadn't even asked her if she wanted to go. But they were right. They loved her, every one of them loved her, and this trip was for her own good. And she loved them. She loved her mother and father, and Peg, and her brother Al, and her little nephew, Danny boy, who was sleeping now. She loved them all and didn't want to leave them.

Al lit his half-smoked cigar, sat back in his chair, and said: "Countess, play us a song."

"Oh, Al, Louise is tired, aren't you darling?" Margaret said.

"I'm all right. I'll play something," Louise said, going to the piano.

Al puffed contentedly on his cigar and looked at Louise's hands as she played. They were thin and delicate. The fingers were long. She had lovely hands, fit for a queen.

He knew that she was going to recover. He wouldn't think of anything else happening.

She was playing *Bell Brandon*, and he closed his eyes and listened to the music. It was a song he liked. It represented

all his ideas of gracious living. He imagined himself and a tall dark woman under a tree in the moonlight.

The song ended.

"That's lovely, Louise darling," Margaret said.

"Oh, I don't really play it well; I miss so many notes."

"You did fine. It was perfectly rendered," Al said, opening his eyes and sitting up quickly.

He saw his youngest sister in profile. Yes, she was a beautiful girl. She would recover. God would cure her if nothing else could.

Paying for her trip to Denver was going to strap him, but he would manage it. He had planned to save some money to invest in the shoe factory; he wouldn't be able to now. But it would be worth every cent he scraped up if this trip would put red roses on her cheeks.

He wondered if he should write to his brother Ned and ask Ned to contribute something for Louise. Ned had walked out on them, leaving the family burden on his shoulders. Well, he was shouldering it.

Louise was playing again. *Oh, Susannah!*

This song was like sunshine, just as *Bell Brandon* was like moonlight. He wanted life to be sunny for all of them, sunny and gracious. He wanted to see Louise grow into a gracious lady. Then some day she'd marry. But if she got tied up with any piker or rogue or cad! Peg was tied up with that Robinson fellow. Millions—being a millionaire didn't make a gentleman. A man who made money had a double responsibility to be a gentleman.

He felt a deepening feeling of gratification. Wherever he went now he was being recognized not only as a live wire but also as a gentleman. He had gone far already, and he had learned much and he was going farther. And he was doing it not only for himself, but for his family.

Louise stopped playing and sat at the piano, staring at the keys. Then she turned around wearily.

"Tired, Louise darling?" Margaret asked sympathetically.

"No, not too tired."

Al reassured himself that Louise would be all right.

He sat back, puffing on his cigar, pleased with himself for all he had done for his family. He must not worry. He must go on doing his best and trusting in God to bring them all happiness and good fortune.

III

"Sure, who knows what will happen to her?" Mary O'Flaherty said.

Margaret became annoyed. Her mother would let things happen to her but not to her baby daughter, Louise.

"Ah, she's only a girl," Mary O'Flaherty went on.

—I'm not a girl. I'm different, Margaret thought.

"Ah, seein' her go away, Peg, it will make me poor old heart bleed. Peg, Peg, can't whateyer they'll do for her in Denver be done here?"

"It's the air that she needs, Mother. The mountain air."

Margaret was thinking that she loved her sister Louise more than her mother did, more than any of them did.

Mary O'Flaherty rocked. The squeaking sound of the rocker irritated Margaret. She was going to say something to her mother, but when she looked up she saw that her mother was in tears.

"Mother! Mother!"

Mary O'Flaherty wiped her eyes with an old handkerchief. But she still cried.

"It's me baby, it's lettin' me baby go away, and mayb. the Lord won't be sendin'g her back to me," Mary O'Flaherty said as she continued to cry.

—My sister is going to die, Margaret thought.

"Mother, she'll come back well and strong, stronger than she's ever been. She'll be cured."

Mary O'Flaherty shook her head and put her handkerchief to her eyes again.

"She was never strong like you and your sister Lizz. Even

as a little one she was thin and frail. Well do I remember."

"That's why she needs this trip."

Mary O'Flaherty wiped her eyes. She blew her nose. She had stopped crying.

"I'll get me beads and say one rosary. Sure, there's a power in prayer."

IV

Mary O'Flaherty's lips moved and her hands went from one bead to another as she rocked slowly.

Margaret sat morose, her elbows on the table, her chin cupped in her hands. •

Al walked into the dining room. He didn't notice the morose look on his sister's face, and the scene pleased him. All was quiet. The home was peaceful. And he was proud. He had made all this possible. He was the support of the family and he had begun to make his way up the ladder so that his family was more comfortable. They had a bathroom. Think of it, his mother and father had lived most of their lives without having a bathroom, and they'd had to wait until they had grown children, until their oldest son was grown, before they could live in a house with plumbing and the bathroom inside, instead of having to go to a shed or a privy. But these were no thoughts to have. They were certainly not elegant.

"Well, this is a peaceful family scene," Al said.

Margaret flashed a resentful glance at him. He didn't notice it.

The sight of his old mother with her beads, rocking away and praying at the end of a day, that was a lovely sight to behold. It gave him hope and courage, because at times home conditions had worried and troubled him so much that they had come close to searing him, searing and burning his soul. But this was the normal state for the family, not the other, when quarrels were rocking the boat. And even with its note of sadness, the evening had been a good one. The note of

sadness would pass. God willing, Louise would be restored to full health.

"I'm sayin' me beads, son," Mary O'Flaherty said, looking up.

"Say a prayer for me, Mother, and for good health for all of us."

"Indeed I do. Not a day passes that I don't pray for you, Al, not a day."

"Thank you, Mother, thank you."

Al went over to Louise.

"Come on, slip us a kiss, a kiss from the Princess Louise."

He bent his cheek down.

Louise kissed his cheek, hastily and indifferently.

"Ah, that was a sweet one. And the other gracious lady of royalty," Al said, going to Margaret and again bending down and putting his cheek near her face.

Margaret gave his cheek a perfunctory kiss.

"I say that Marie Antoinette and Maria Theresia and the Empress Eugénie in all their glory couldn't hold a candle to our two fair young ladies, the young ladies O'Flaherty," Al said with simulated jolliness.

"Sure, it's good that they're in for a change instead of bein' out gallivanting," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Why, Mother, I'm home most nights," Margaret said.

"Nix, nix, Mother, we won't have any quarrels tonight," Al said.

"Mother doesn't mean all she says," Margaret said.

They all became silent again, sitting with nothing to say. Margaret went to the sideboard and got a deck of cards. She sat down at the table, shuffled the cards, and began to play solitaire.

Al nervously hovered over her.

She could forget and not worry, playing solitaire. But why must he hang over her, almost breathing on her?

"Here, here, the red deuce, Peg," he said impatiently, tak-

ing a two of diamonds off one pile and placing it on another, over the three of clubs.

He turned up a card that had been under the two of diamonds.

"I saw it," Margaret said, annoyed. Was there anything he couldn't tell you how to do?

"I thought you didn't, Peg . . . Peg, there, there, your black eight."

Margaret took the stack of cards in her hands and slammed them on the table. They slid over the table and a few fell on the floor.

"Goddamn it, mind your own goddamn business," she shouted.

She rushed out of the room.

Al was stunned.

"What did I do?" he asked, bewildered.

"Why in hell don't you marry some girl and tell her what to do?" Margaret shouted from the hallway.

"I was only helping her play the game," Al said in hurt innocence.

"You wouldn't even let me play jacks without interfering when I was a little girl," Margaret shouted.

"Louise, go and mollify your sister," Al said.

Louise reluctantly rose.

Old Tom appeared in the dining room, barefooted and in a long nightgown.

"The only way a man can have peace, his family is by dyin'," he complained.

Louise left the room.

Margaret could be heard in the front of the house.

"Pa," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Ignoring his wife, Old Tom went on:

"Shut up, the whole parcel of you. When I was young, it's a fool I was for not givin' all of you more of me razor strop."

"Pa, go put your slippers on, you poor man, or you might

be catchin' your death of cold in your bare feet," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Bare feet? Bare feet be damned. In me day I should have tanned the bare backsides of the whole pack and parcel of ye."

"Ah, Tom, me good man, don't be excitin' yourself about them. Sure, it's nothin'—nothin' at all but a little fight they're havin', and I like it, sittin' here and listenin'," Mary O'Flaherty said.

v

What would she do away in Denver alone? Next week they were shipping her off to Denver. What would she do there alone? If she coughed at night and was all alone? And if she was all alone and died coughing in the middle of the night? Oh, if going away would make her strong and well and take down her fever and she could come back home a healthy girl. She knew it would, because even if she did tell herself that she was going to die young, she knew that she didn't believe it. She really believed that she wasn't going to die, but was going to get well. Why, every morning she would think that this was the day when she was going to begin getting well.

She felt warm all over, with her cheeks flushed, and her whole body hot, and she was warm between her legs. She was excited. She must have a fever.

Maybe if she prayed more. Her mother and her sister Lizz and her aunt prayed for her. Her sister Lizz was always sending little offerings that she could ill afford to the Poor Clares to pray for her. But wouldn't it be better if she prayed herself? She did say her good-night prayers every night, and she prayed at mass every Sunday, but if she prayed more?

She had never been really holy. Lizz was the only holy one in the family, and maybe her mother was, too.

Louise opened her eyes wide and stared into the darkness, as if by doing this she might look up into heaven and see God. She suddenly wished to see God, so she could speak to Him

and ask Him what was going to become of her. Why couldn't she know? Why couldn't people know what was going to happen to them so that they didn't have to go on wondering and worrying and being afraid? Everything in life was sad because of this, because you didn't know, because no matter what you thought of and wanted for yourself, and dreamed of yourself having and getting, you didn't know if you would get it or not, or if you would even live long enough to get it and have it and enjoy it.

SECTION THREE

Chapter Eighteen

I

MOTHER, when is Saturday?"

"Today's only Wednesday, son."

"Tomorrow isn't Saturday?"

"No, son, tomorrow's Thursday."

"I wish today was Saturday," Danny said.

"You'll just have to wait for the time to come, son."

"I can't wait for Saturday."

"You go out and play and get yourself some air and sunshine and a good appetite, son."

"I wish it was Saturday," Danny said.

Aunt Louise came into the dining room.

"How do you feel, Louise?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"Oh, I feel fine, Mother."

She was so glad to be back home again, and she felt so much better. She'd gained about five pounds. Her face was still thin, but her cheeks had plenty of color in them. Oh, she felt like a different person. Last night she had waked up coughing but that was nothing to worry about. It was February, and she could expect to catch colds and to cough a little in the winter.

Wait until spring came. She'd be her old self again, happy and singing around the house, and feeling really gay and having plenty of beaux. That was the way she'd been a little over a year ago. By spring she'd be working again. She felt wonderfully happy, and it was so good to be back. And she'd seen to it that she'd gotten back in time for Danny's birthday party next Saturday.

"Aunt Louise, you won't get sick for Saturday?" Danny asked.

"Oh, no, Danny, of course I won't."

"Don't you wish it was Saturday?"

"Yes," she said.

"I do. I can't wait."

"It'll come soon—it's not so far away," Louise said.

"When?"

"Oh, you know the days of the week, don't you, Danny boy?"

"Of course I do, Aunt Louise. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday."

"Then you know when Saturday will come if today is only Wednesday, don't you?"

"Of course I do, Aunty Louise."

"Then why do you ask me when Saturday will be?"

"Because I can't wait for Saturday."

II

The children at the party were all quiet and sat as if they didn't know what to do. Danny sat beside his cousin, Ruth Higgins, and Little Margaret rocked in the big chair, looking very small. Arthur Andrews, a five-year-old neighbor, sat twiddling his thumbs across from Danny.

"When do we eat ice cream and cake?" Bill asked, standing near the piano and looking bored; he was the oldest at the party.

Arthur Andrews laughed.

"I like ice cream and cake," Little Margaret said.

"Who doesn't?" Arthur Andrews said.

"I do, I like it," Ruth Higgins said. She was a skinny blond girl of five, with a thin and somewhat pointed face. Her eyes were blue and her complexion was pale. She wore a white dress, white stockings, and high, black shoes.

Danny stared at her with interest. He liked her. Maybe he liked her enough to have her for his girl.

He looked from her to Little Margaret. He guessed he liked Ruth Higgins better. Ruth Higgins and Little Margaret wore

white stockings. He was six and a boy. Why did they still make him wear white stockings and long curls like a girl when he was six years old? He wanted to get older faster so he could wear black stockings all of the time and have his hair cut short. Arthur Andrews wasn't six yet and he wore black stockings just like Bill.

He looked at Ruth Higgins again and said:

"Well, my grandmother bought chocolate ice cream and my aunt made chocolate cake all for me."

"Can't we have any?" Arthur Andrews asked.

"No," Bill said.

At the same time, Danny said:

"Of course, that's what we got it for, for everybody at the party to eat ice cream and cake."

"I'm five," Ruth Higgins said. •

"You'll be six some day," Danny said.

"When?" Arthur Andrews asked.

"When are you going to be six?"

He looked at Ruth with eager eyes. Yes, he guessed she was his girl. Aunt Louise was his girl, too, but that was different. She was his aunt, and she was a grownup. Ruth Higgins was thin like Aunt Louise.

"Do something, Dan," Bill said. "It's your birthday. Do something because it's your birthday."

"I don't know what to do."

"Kiss Ruth."

Ruth Higgins timidly shook her head from side to side as if to say "No." Then she sucked her right thumb.

Danny looked at her, but he didn't move.

"Go ahead, kiss her," Arthur Andrews said.

Danny wished Bill and Arthur Andrews hadn't said it.

"I'll do it," Arthur Andrews said.

"Then why don't you?"

"It isn't my birthday."

That didn't seem to Danny to make any difference, but he didn't say anything. Since they had said he ought to kiss Ruth

Higgins, he wanted to. He looked at her. He wouldn't do it but he wanted to. He wished they hadn't said it.

"Let's play a game," Danny said.

"What game?" Arthur Andrews asked.

"Any game."

"Any game? I never heard of a game called any game," Bill said.

"I didn't mean any game is a game. I meant let's play any game you want to play," Danny explained, not liking it that Bill was making fun of him.

"Are you children having a good time?" Aunt Margaret asked sweetly, appearing at the parlor entrance.

For a moment none of them answered her.

"Don't be impatient. In just a few minutes we'll be ready to let you have your ice cream and cake. Oh, you're all going to love it. I baked the loveliest cake for Danny's party."

"And can I have a big piece of cake?" Arthur Andrews asked.

"Of course you can, you little angel."

"As big as I want?"

"Oh, you little darling, your eyes are bigger than your stomach. But you'll have a big piece. All of you will. And Ruth, dearie, are you enjoying yourself at the party?"

Ruth Higgins nodded her head slowly as she said:

"Yes, Miss O'Flaherty."

"Well, now all of you be patient, and soon you'll have the goodies."

Margaret turned and walked back to the rear of the apartment.

Danny went to a corner and took out one of his birthday presents. It was a spinning game that Ruth had brought him.

"Let's play," Danny said.

Bill, Danny, and Arthur sat in the center of the parlor floor.

Bill grabbed the cover off the game.

"Let's go," he said.

"How do we play?" Danny asked.

"I want to play," Little Margaret said.

"You're too little and you're a girl," Bill said.

"How do we play?" Danny asked.

"I want the red car," Arthur Andrews said.

"Can I play, please?" Ruth asked.

"The red car's mine," Bill said.

"No it isn't, I want it," Arthur Andrews whined.

"I want blue," Danny said.

"Red's my favorite color. I want red," Arthur Andrews said.

"You take yellow," Bill said.

"If I can't have red I won't play," Arthur Andrews said.

"I got blue," Danny said.

"Shut up, you kids, and let me read the rules," Bill said.

Arthur Andrews snatched the little red car from the game box.

"That's mine," Bill said.

"I won't play," Arthur Andrews said, throwing the little red car at the piano.

"Don't throw that, it's mine," Danny said.

Ruth began to cry.

"Aw, who wants to play with you kids—you're just a bunch of babies," Bill said.

Arthur Andrews kicked at the game.

"Don't touch my game or I'll kill you!" Danny shouted at him.

"Oh, they're fighting," Ruth Higgins bawled out.

"Oh, good, a fight!" Little Margaret said. "I want to see a fight."

"So it's a fight you want—I'll fight the pack of you Indians," Old Tom said, appearing in the parlor with a twinkle in his eyes; his face was grayer and thinner than it had been last summer.

"I want to go home," Arthur Andrews said.

"Come on, all of you now, sit down and I'll tell you a story

about when I was your age in ^{the} old country," Old Tom said.

The children quieted down immediately.

"Come, children, I have the loveliest ice cream and cake you ever ate," Margaret said at the parlor entrance.

The children bolted past Old Tom as he began:

"When I was a little tot . . ."

III

Aunt Louise and Aunt Margaret hovered over the table. From the kitchen, Mary O'Flaherty called sharply.

"Where's Pa?"

"Mother, we can do everything. Don't bother poor Father."

"I told that man of mine to be here if I needed him," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Margaret hurried to the kitchen.

"What do you want done, Mother? I'll do it. Let Pa be."

"Sure, I can do everything meself, but I told Pa to be here."

"He's in the front, resting."

Aunt Louise watched the children eating.

—Birthdays, she thought, they are such happy days for a child if there is a party.

She had had only one birthday's party, when she was seven. She looked at Danny. His little face was shining. His eyes were bright. And he had such curly hair. A girl ought to have hair like his, not a boy. His bright blue eyes. He sat at the head of the table like a little king. He had ice cream on his chin.

Tensely she watched as ice cream dropped off his spoon onto the tablecloth.

But what difference did it make? The children were enjoying their ice cream and cake. She wanted to be a little girl again. She wished that she were six or seven and having a birthday party. She had passed her birthday alone in Denver. Oh, it had been such a miserable, unhappy day.

"What are going to do when you're a man, Little Brother?" Margaret asked, standing over the children.

"I like chocolate ice cream the best," Danny said to Ruth Higgins.

"I like chocolate. I like strawberry ice cream, too," Ruth Higgins said.

"I want more ice cream," Little Margaret said.

"Oh, you little sweetheart, I'll get it for you," Margaret said.

She went to the kitchen.

"I want more ice cream, too," Danny called after her.

"Peg! Peg! Louise! Get more ice cream for me grandson," Mary O'Flaherty shouted from the kitchen.

"Aunt Louise, you get me my chocolate ice cream," Danny said.

"Of course I will, Danny boy," Louise said.

She went over to him, kissed the top of his head, picked up his plate, and with a swish of her long dress went into the kitchen.

Danny turned to Ruth Higgins and said shyly, "You can kiss me too, like my Aunt Louise does."

Ruth Higgins went on eating ice cream as if she hadn't heard him.

IV

Old Tom sat at the head of the dinner table, in Al's place. He pecked at his food silently.

"You should have seen them at me grandson's party, Pa," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"I seen them and I heard them," Old Tom said.

"How old are you, Father?" Danny asked.

"Is that the manners you're teachin' him?" Old Tom asked, gazing across the table at Mary.

"I'm six and Auntie Louise is twenty. And—"

"Little Brother, you must never ask grownups their age.

It's impolite to do that. It's not 'veing a little gentleman, and we want you to be a gentleman," Margaret said.

"Is Father a gentleman?"

"I'm askin' you, Mary, what in the name of God do you be teachin' him, asking them questions at 'his age!"

Louise smiled.

"Of course, Little Brother, your grandfather is a gentleman. He's a perfect gentleman."

"But he doesn't dress up all the time like Uncle Al does."

"In all me born days, I never heard a lad his age talk like he does. Where does he be gettin' the ideas he has?"

"Isn't a gentleman somebody who always dresses up like Uncle Al?" Danny asked.

He looked bewildered as his two aunts burst into laughter.

"Son, you're a smart one," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Old Tom glanced aside and winced with pain. Turning back, he forced a smile on his grizzled face and said gently:

"Smart he is. Me boy, you're a smart little fellow. Sure, you'll grow up to be something mighty fine and smart. You'll be educated, and there'll be new wonders in the world for your eyes to behold."

"You're not eating much, son," Mary O'Flaherty said, turning toward Danny.

"I'm not hungry, Mother."

"I'll bet I know why," Aunt Margaret said, beaming across the table.

"I ate lots of ice cream, more ice cream than I ever ate before in my whole life."

"That's all right, it's your birthday, Little Brother."

"I have a much better appetite since I came back," Louise said.

"And you look so much better, Louise dearest. It did you worlds of good, just as I said it would," Margaret told her.

"Pa, you ought to eat more," Mary said.

"Sure, I'm not hungry. I had some of the little fellow's ice cream, and it took away me appetite," Old Tom said.

"I'm not working tomorrow, Father, and I'm going to cook you the most wonderful chicken soup."

"That I'll eat, Peg."

"No one cooks chicken soup like I do—do they, Pa?" Margaret asked.

"Indeed not."

They were quiet for a few moments, and then, looking across the table, Margaret asked:

"And Danny boy, did you have a good time at your party?"

"Oh, yes I did, Aunt Peg. Can I have another birthday tomorrow?"

They laughed.

"But you can't have a birthday every day, Little Brother."

"I want it."

"Didn't Ruth Higgins look like a little angel?" Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Yes, and she was so well-mannered," Aunt Margaret said. Aunt Margaret turned to Danny. "Did you like your cousin Ruth?"

"She's my girl."

They smiled proudly.

"Who said that?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"You all did. You all told me that she was my girl."

"Sure, he's startin' young, saying he has a girl," Old Tom commented.

"Little Margaret was so sweet, too. And my oldest nephew Billy boy was good. I'm sorry Lizz came and rushed home with them so quickly," Margaret said.

"She has her own man to take care of," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Ruth Higgins is your girl, Danny?" Louise asked.

"Son, you'll have time and time enough for girls," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Oh, Mother, it's harmless," Margaret said.

Danny suddenly looked at them questioningly. What did they mean?

"What did you and Ruth Higgins talk about, Danny boy?" Aunt Louise asked.

"Ice cream."

They smiled again.

"Ice cream?" Aunt Margaret asked. "What did you have to say about ice cream?"

"She likes strawberry ice cream best. I like chocolate ice cream best."

"When I was a little girl I used to love ice cream," Aunt Louise said nostalgically.

"I'm going to have a party on my next birthday," Danny said.

"Oh, with this birthday party only just over, are you thinking of the next one already?" Aunt Margaret asked.

He shook his head and then, as he caught her eyes, he gave Margaret a beaming smile.

Old Tom looked down as he winced again with a sudden sharp pain. He quickly pecked at his food so that they wouldn't plague him about not eating.

He watched his grandson basking in the love of the women of the family.

Ah, sometimes he'd watch the little fellow playing, making up games by himself, talking to himself, and he'd sit and watch and think about the little lad.

What would his little grandson be like when he grew up to be a man? That was a question he liked to ask himself and think about. He'd be going to school and learning to read and write, just as his own children could read and write, and he'd grow up maybe to get a fine job and even be rich. Look at his son Al and what he did, selling shoes, traveling and living in fine hotels, like the fine hotel his daughter Peg worked in. In America you could get rich! Not a poor greenhorn like himself, but the children and the grandchildren of a poor greenhorn could, and he was only an old greenhorn, and he knew

it, but maybe his children and grandchildren would come to know how hard he worked, and after he was gone remember him and have a mass said for his soul now and again while his bones would be lying out there in that plot of burying ground in Calvary Cemetery.

"You're quiet, Tom," Mary said.

"I was thinkin' to meself, Mary."

"Are you all right, Tom?"

"And why shouldn't I be all right, Mary?"

"You're so quiet these days," Mary said.

"Father talked a lot tonight," Louise said.

"Ah, I'm not a one to be talkin' all of the time."

"You were a talker in your day, Tom."

"Like the devil I was. Not with you around me, Mary. Sure, I never met the woman who could talk when you wanted to be talking yourself."

"And you never will, Tom."

He shook his head in agreement.

Mary watched him closely.

"Tom, what's ailin' you?"

"It's just me age, Mary. Mary, I'm an old man. I'm an old man and good for nothin' at all. I'd be just as well off six feet under the ground as here, eatin' the food I don't earn."

"You go and lay down in bed, and I'll give you the hot water bag to ease your pains, Tom."

"I think I will lie down, Mary," Old Tom said, rising.

Looking after him anxiously, Mary blessed herself. He had walked out of the room so slowly.

He seemed weak, poor man, and once, small a man as he was, he had had such strength. Couldn't she remember how he had used to hug and hold her with those strong arms of his? Couldn't she remember him working in the fields before they came out here and lifting her clean off of her feet at the end of a day with the sun going down? Ah, her old heart could break remembering all this and seeing Pa walk out of the room the way he had just this minute ago.

V

Old Tom lay alone in the darkness, holding the hot water bag wrapped in a big towel over his stomach. He was thinking.

Ah, he didn't know how it had all happened, how all the years had passed since he had come out from Ireland to America, and how it had happened that he had become an old man. Many a time he had said to himself or to Mary that they were getting old. The time had gone. It was more years than he could remember. His little grandson having a happy birthday today made him think of this; all of the time he had been out here in America it had been as if part of himself was not here with him. No scholar was he, no educated man, and how could he be understanding this and understanding what it all was that had happened to him?

And, yes, he knew he was never going back, and that much he knew on the day the ship took him out of Queenstown Bay and into the ocean. Sure, didn't he stand and look at the land and the hills by the side of the water, with the sun shining on them, and hadn't he told himself that he would never again be seeing Ireland and his mother and father and all of his own? The sun was shining that day, with all of them packed on the boat leaving Queenstown harbor, but a cold day it was, with the wind blowing through him by the rail of the boat. And what had there been for him or Mary in Ireland? Sure, didn't he think he was doing the right thing in coming out, and didn't everyone he knew think it was the right thing? And how those that weren't going had looked at him with envy. To this day he could remember the look Sean Tobin had given him in front of his own father's house just before he was leaving. Sean Tobin was dead, God have mercy on his soul. Yes, yes indeed, many there was that had envied him for his going out to America, and because Mary was coming after him to be his bride. And how they had

told him it was the world he would be seeing and the wonders of the world.

He didn't feel the pain now and he'd be going off to sleep, and, like on many a night, thoughts were coming and going in his head. Tonight he was thinking how he was now an old man. Hadn't he known this for a long time? There was nothing he thought about as much as that these days. That now he was an old man.

He sighed. And he was thinking of the shortness of life. His mother and father were dead. His brother in Ireland was dead. God alone knew what happened to his brother who ran out to Australia because of the draft in the war in the days of President Lincoln. And all of these years here in America, all of these years since he had been a young lad coming to make money for himself and Mary in America, he had had that feeling that he didn't belong here in America. And now when he knew there was not much time ahead of him before his time would come he was feeling the same. He'd never talked to Mary about it. There were things you couldn't talk to a woman about, or to anyone about. Maybe there was a thing or two he could say to his friend Father Hunt, if he could know how to say the things he wanted to say.

There was a dull pain now in his stomach. He tried to ignore it as if it weren't there inside of him.

Mary said often that she never wanted to go back. Once he had been drinking beer with her and he'd told her that he wanted to go back, and to be back home when it was his time to die, and to be buried back with his own kind, with his father and mother and brother.

Suddenly Old Tom was stiff with fear, and for a moment it was as though he were holding his breath and not even breathing. He had thought of himself dead, himself a corpse in a coffin. He moved his legs. He hadn't died yet. He would sleep tonight and wake up in the morning, and he wouldn't be dead then. But it was going to come some day, and when it came he knew that he was going to be afraid.

He could remember himself as a little boy in bare feet, back in Ireland, running home to his mother after playing in the fields. Ah, and wasn't the grass soft under his feet in the old country when he was a boy? It wasn't the same for the children here in Chicago and America.

He was drowsy.

There was a sudden thud of a shoe against his door. He heard his daughter Margaret saying:

"Danny boy, don't bother your grandfather tonight."

"But it's my birthday," Danny said.

Wearily Old Tom put the hot water bag aside and slowly got out of bed. He reached up and pulled the chain to turn on the electric light.

"You're a little devil," he called through the door, trying to sound gruff and angry and casting his eyes about in search of his razor strop.

He could hear the sound of Danny's happy, excited laughter and of his bare feet quickly padding down the hall.

Chapter Nineteen

I

THE room was dark.
He had measles.

When you had measles, the room had to be dark. If it wasn't dark, they said, the measles would hurt your eyes, do something to them.

"Are you all right, son?" his grandmother called from the hallway.

"Mother?"

"Yes, son?"

"When can I get out of bed?"

"You'll be up and about in a day or two."

"Yes, Mother," he said in a weak voice.

He was tired and hot. It was like there was hotness in his legs and arms and on his forehead and all over him.

His grandmother came into the room. He gazed up at her with appealing eyes. He felt her cool hand laid gently on his forehead and then on his cheek. Her hands felt good on him. If his grandmother kept putting her hand on him and on his head and his forehead and his cheek the hotness maybe would go away. The hotness was fever. They told him that. It was fever, and you shouldn't be afraid because fever was part of the measles and it went away.

He wasn't afraid.

Mother was taking care of him. She was in his room so much, and if he called her she almost came running in, and she kept coming in all the time even if he didn't call her, and she was taking care of him. Maybe if Mother was taking

care of him this way, nothing could happen to him because she was watching him so nothing could happen to him.

"You're not so hot, son."

"Mother—is the 'un out?"

"Oh, yes. It's a grand day."

"I wish I could go out and play."

"You'll be out sooner than you know. Once you are on your feet, I'll build you up and you'll be out running and playing, never fear, son."

"What's it like out, Mother?"

"Ah, it's a grand April day. But, son, you take a little nap and rest yourself."

"I had a dream."

"What did you dream, son?"

"I forget it."

"I'll be here for everything you need. You take another little nap, son."

"Mother, why did they put the sign on the door?"

"Sure, if I had me way, I'd tear it down."

"Is it red?"

"Yes, son. It's a red sign."

"And nobody can come in and see us?"

"Ah, that's the law. Didn't I ask Dr. O'Donnell not to be putting up the sign, but it's the law."

"Mother, remember when they had the red sign on the door of the boy across the street, Tommy Edgcomb?"

"No, I don't, son. When was that?"

"Remember—they had the red sign and he died."

She didn't speak for a moment, and he knew she was afraid. Mother being afraid made him feel afraid.

"That wasn't the measles—that poor little fellow had scarlet fever."

"And you don't always die when they put up the red sign on your door, Mother?"

"No, son. Never fear."

She didn't seem afraid now. She was even smiling now, so, yes, she really wasn't afraid,)

"Nearly every child gets the measles."

"I don't like the measles."

She patted him.

"Rest, son. Rest and you'll be over them and up and out and about before you know it."

"Mary! Mary!"

"Your grandfather is callin' me now, son."

"What's Father got to make him sick? Has he got measles, too?"

"It's just his stomach, Rest, son, and in a little while I'll be bringing you a nice hot bowl of soup."

"What's the matter with Father's stomach?"

"He just has an ache, a pain in it."

"Mary! Mary!"

He didn't like the way Father was calling Mother. Father sounded like his stomach ache hurt him a lot.

"I'm coming, Tom," Mary O'Flaherty called.

II

Old Tom was lying on the cot in the dining room by the window. He wore a grayish nightgown and was unshaven, his beard looking thick and wiry. His face looked even grayer than it had almost two months ago on Danny's birthday. He had lost weight, and his neck was flabby with lumpy skin. His wrists were thin, his wristbones protruded noticeably.

"Here I am, Tom. I was in to see me grandson."

"Mary?" he said.

His voice was weak.

"The pains are eating in me again, Mary."

"You poor man, let me give you the hot water bag and light the holy candle. What the hot water bag can't do, the holy candle and the Lord can."

Old Tom looked at her gratefully. He put his hands to

his stomach under the sheet and light blanket which covered his thin old body.

"Where is thy ache?"

"In me stomach."

"Maybe you need some Castor Oil. It's maybe your bowels, Tom."

He looked at her, embarrassed and with pleading eyes.

"It's the pains."

"I'll light the candle. Tom, we must trust in the Lord Himself."

Old Tom nodded meaninglessly. He gazed at Mary as though she could stop his pains. Suddenly he felt as though it were all a fuss he was making over nothing at all. The pains were gone now. He wasn't sure but that he hadn't had any pains a minute or two ago when he had called her.

He gazed at her, almost like a guilty child.

"I swear I felt them a minute ago, Mary. I'd swear I did by all that's holy."

"What's that you're saying, Tom?"

"I'm after saying, Mary, that I'd swear I felt the pains ripping in me stomach, and now I don't feel them, not in the least at all."

"Praise be to God," she exclaimed excitedly.

She blessed herself.

"Tom, the Lord did it."

"Well, thank the Lord."

"Here, I'll get the holy candle and light it. Praise the Lord for stopping your pains, Tom."

He lay back, tired, relieved by the absence of pain. He closed his heavy-lidded eyes.

III

Mary O'Flaherty found her husband asleep when she entered the dining room with the hot water bottle. She stood, holding it and gazing at him. His mouth was open, and his

teeth were small, yellowish, and stained with tobacco. He snored.

Asleep, he looked older. There were bags under his eyes, and there was a hollow on either side of his nose.

A great sorrow came over her. Sure, couldn't she tell, looking at Pa sleeping now, that he wasn't a well man? And he was old. He looked old. She was old herself. But there wasn't a gray hair in her head, and didn't her children always tell her how young she looked? Of a night, now and again, she would have her aches and pains, and she would know that she was old, too. But the Lord, thanks be to Him, had given her her health, and there was some strength still left in her old bones. But the strength was hardly left in poor Pa.

She tiptoed back into the kitchen.

Old Tom was snoring.

From the kitchen she heard the front door opening.

Quietly she went to the front to see if it were Louise who had just come in. She had sneaked out for a bit of fresh air, even though the sign was on the door.

"You didn't stay out long," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Louise sank weakly into a chair in the parlor.

"I thought I would come back and take a nap, Mother. And what with the quarantine sign on the door, I was a little afraid one of the neighbors would see me and report us to the health authorities."

"Just let them, and they'll have to reckon with me."

Louise didn't speak.

It was true that she'd been afraid of the neighbors noticing her because of their quarantine sign, but she'd wanted to come back because she'd felt tired and hot, too. After walking as far as Fifty-first Street and Indiana Avenue, she had known that she couldn't go on. She had felt tired in her legs and arms and all over herself, and she'd turned around and walked back home. Those few blocks back had seemed so long.

"Your father and me little grandson are asleep. Be quiet so as not to waken them," Mary told her daughter.

Louise sank back and sighed.

Here it was April, and she wasn't able to work as she'd hoped. She'd been home from Denver about two months or so, and she wasn't gaining the way she had expected to when she'd left. Peg had told her that it took time. She must give herself time. But how much time?

Her beautiful face was getting thin again. She looked as though her thoughts were far away and lost in another world. She continued to sit with her mother, feeling very drowsy. She only wanted to sleep. If she slept for a long time, something would happen to her, she didn't know what, but something, and it would be good.

"Your father was having pains in his stomach, but by the time I got him a hot water bag, poor man, he was asleep. I think the Lord did it. God is good, and He took away your father's pains."

It was as though there were a curtain in her mind and in her ears and she heard through this curtain. She was sorry to hear this about her father, but she didn't really feel sad about it. She didn't feel much of anything except this drowsiness.

Mary O'Flaherty suddenly got out of her chair.

"I think I hear me little grandson stirring," she said, hurrying out of the room.

Louise sat, very still.

Like sounds coming from far away, she could hear her mother and her father talking about his pains. It all sounded different from what it ought to sound. It was not only that they seemed so far away, it was like some kind of a dream. She wasn't sleeping, but yet it seemed that she was having a dream.

"I know, Tom, you poor man . . ."

Mother talking. She didn't hear the rest of what Mother was saying.

Her arms, her legs—there was such tiredness in them. What had she been thinking about? She couldn't remember. Feeling this way, with this tiredness in her and all over her, it seemed as if she were almost not living. It was as if she was living

and she was not living, not being either alive or being dead, but being just as she was.

Mother was talking, and Danny was calling now.

"Just a minute, son," Mother called back to him.

It was as if she didn't know what she was. It was as if she were somewhere else when she knew that she was at home, sitting in the parlor.

IV

She wasn't eating much, and she noticed that her father wasn't, either. But Peg was. Peg was in one of her moods tonight, but Peg was eating. She didn't know why she didn't want to eat more, because she needed to build herself up and she felt hungry. It was that she just didn't want to. She was getting to feel that she just didn't care.

She wondered why Peg was in one of her nervous states, and why Peg was in these states so often. Peg had her health, and she was still young enough to do so many things in life.

If she herself only had Peg's health, she wouldn't care about anything else. Doctor O'Donnell told her she would be built up and strong again, and she wasn't to worry. She wasn't worried. It wasn't exactly worry that she felt. It was something else. It was just that she was sad.

"Me little grandson is cool, thank the Lord, he's as cool as a cucumber," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Oh, I'm so glad," Louise said.

"With me to take care of me little grandson, nothing can happen to him. He's never had the whooping cough, and it was someone that brought the measles into this house—someone."

"Don't look at me that way, Mother—I didn't bring the measles in," Peg said.

"I didn't say who it was—I said it was someone."

Louise hoped that Margaret and her mother wouldn't get into another fight.

"Everyone gets the measles—all of us had measles when we were little," she said.

"And I had diphtheria," Margaret said in a complaining voice.

"I don't remember that too well," Louise said.

"It was the last time, from that day to this, that a red sign was on the 'door of this house," Mary O'Flaherty said positively.

"Ah, and what's the use of a sign? Sure, every one of us has snuck out," Old Tom said.

"I have to—somebody has to—I have to work. How would we go on if I didn't work or if I was to lose my job?" Margaret said.

"I wish I could work," Louise said.

"Louise dear, darling, I wasn't talking about you—I was thinking of Ned," Margaret explained, her voice and manner suddenly becoming almost cloyingly sweet.

"Me son Ned was always a good, open-hearted lad," Old Tom said.

"Father, you always liked Ned," Margaret said.

"That one he married is old enough to be his mother, and her sick most of the time," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"If I had run off and married, I'd never have heard the end of it, but he could do it—he could leave us when we needed him to support us."

"Me son Ned can get married as he did, but let me son Al—let some woman make eyes at me son Al," Mary O'Flaherty said belligerently.

"I'm the one who's tied down," Margaret complained. "Ned was always free as the wind. He hardly ever worked when he was home. Work and Ned didn't agree—and I say that even though he is my own brother."

"Sure and isn't he workin' now on the road, selling shoes?" Old Tom asked.

"Yes, now that he's married. Mildred sees to that. But if he was home here with us, he'd still be living the life of a gentle-

man, getting up at noon," Margaret said. "With a wife owning a millinery store on State Street in Madison, he doesn't have to worry about how he's doing. None of us need to worry about him."

"Ah, Peg, don't be so hard on the lad," Old Tom said.

"I don't mean to, Pa, but with all our troubles he could send Mother a money order now and then."

"Our Lord said that man must work by the sweat of his brow," Mary O'Flaherty said, her voice dour.

Louise rubbed her sleepy eyes. She wanted to go to bed early, but if she did they would all notice it. She didn't want them to know the way she was feeling these days.

"I'll get the tea," Margaret said glumly, rising from the table.

She banged a pot in the kitchen.

"Oh, what's ever going to become of us?" she cried out, her voice heavy with despair.

Chapter Twenty

I

THE ceiling was dark but it wasn't the sky. It was only the sky of the room. He was looking at the ceiling. He didn't feel hot and sick now, but he still had to stay in bed. Maybe they would let him get up tomorrow. But even if he got up, he couldn't go out. The sign was still on the door. If he went out he might give some other kids the measles.

There was nothing to do being in bed this way. He wished he was a man. He wanted to be grown up and a man, like Uncle Al and Papa were. They always asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. What did he want to be when he became a man?

He gazed seriously at the ceiling.

When he became a man, he wanted to be a man. But he guessed that if he told them that, they would laugh. Grown-ups laughed at the things that you meant, and sometimes you said things that were funny and they didn't laugh at all. When he grew up to be a man, would he be like other grown-ups?

There was Aunt Louise, passing by the bedroom. She didn't look in. She didn't come in much while he was being kept here in bed with the measles.

He started to call to her but he didn't. He couldn't make himself ask her to come in and see him. He wanted her to come and talk to him and sit with him.

She was gone in the parlor now. He could still call her. His lips moved as he silently called her name to himself.

—Aunt Louise.

If she wouldn't come in and see him and talk to him and

ask him how he was and if he felt better, he wouldn't ask her to. He was mad at her. Yes, he was mad at his Aunt Louise. Maybe he didn't love her any more. Maybe he loved Mother more, or Aunt Peg, and maybe Aunt Peg was nicer to him than Aunt Louise was.

He wished she would come in and sit with him.

Again he silently called her.

—Aunt Louise.

He waited a moment, expecting an answer. She didn't even answer him. He was mad at her for that, too. But he hadn't called her so she could hear him.

He imagined her answering him:

—Yes, Danny. Yes, Danny boy.

If she didn't come in and see him without his calling her, he wasn't going to call her.

II

They gave him pills and they moved his bowels, and what in the name of God, what good did it do him? The Devil could have the pills, and the Devil could take the medicine and the Castor Oil, and let the Devil himself go and move his bowels.

And so this was what he had come to in his old age, having pains and taking things that tasted like the devil to flush his bowels and his insides out! And having more pains, and the women in his family talking to him about his bowels. God take pity on his poor old soul, this was what he had come to at the end of his days.

Lying on his cot in the dining room, he automatically blessed himself.

And maybe a can of beer now and again was not good for him any more, but what in the name of God was there left for him in life but a swig of beer when he could have one and a pipeful of tobacco?

And there was his daughter Peg, pacing the floor, in and out of the room, back and forth, walking up and down,

nervous, in one of her nervous states, and telling him about her nerves. He was the one who should be having the nerves and talking about them.

She had to stay home because of the sign on the door. They called it being in quarantine, or something like that, and it meant you were like a leper and couldn't be with anyone else or go out.

"How are you, Pa?" Margaret asked.

"Ah, how am I?" he asked.

"The boy is up and about. It seems to me that the sign could be taken off the door."

"Why don't you just slip out the back way and down the alley like your mother just did?"

"She saw me last night. I'm certain that she reported me to the health authorities."

"That one upstairs, was it?"

"And after all that I did for Murtha Morton," Margaret complained bitterly.

Old Tom nodded knowingly. He sat up in the cot and scratched his head.

"If I see that one on the street walking one way, I walk the other way," Old Tom said.

"To do such a thing to me," Margaret said, wringing her hands together. She turned toward her father. "What was that you said, Pa?"

Old Tom was looking out of the window.

"I was saying—it's a grand day out, Peg."

Was the sun shining today in the old country? Or was it raining? They had plenty of rain there. When he was a young buck and in love with his Mary, he used to want the sun to be shining. And there she was, with a black shawl over her head, coming in at the backyard gate from the alley, carrying a package. There she was. She was the same one, the Mary he loved in the old country where she was a girl. And he was the same Tom O'Flaherty who loved her and would walk the roads and the fields, and sit watching the sun go down of

a night, with nothing but Mary, Mary filling up his mind with dreams.

She was walking up the stairs.

—And it's not much longer that I'll be living, he told himself.

He heard his wife letting herself in by the kitchen door.

"That you, Mary?" Tom asked absently, knowing that it was.

"I met Mrs. Morton on Forty-seventh Street—sure, she's not such a bad one."

Tom wasn't listening to her. He was looking through the window at the sunny day.

"She wanted to know how all of us are and how me little grandson is, and she said she was so sorry that he has the measles. And she was askin' if she couldn't come down and help me out."

Tom continued to stare out the dining-room window.

"What did you say about Martha Morton?" Margaret asked from the hallway.

"Ah, she's a good woman," Mary O'Flaherty went on.

Margaret came into the kitchen.

"What was that you said, Mother?"

Mary O'Flaherty was setting her bag down on the kitchen table. Then she took off her shawl and went into her bedroom without answering. Margaret stared at her door impatiently.

"Yes, I was saying—she's not a bad soul," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"She didn't report me then?"

"What's that you're sayin', Peg?"

"I said that maybe Martha Morton didn't report me to the health authorities after all."

"And why should she be reportin' you to the police?"

"I didn't say the police. I said the health authorities," Margaret said.

"She spoke well of you too, Peg."

"She did? What did she say?"

"She spoke well of you. She asked after you and said what a good girl you are."

"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'Peg's me daughter.'"

Margaret walked to the edge of the kitchen and stood there indecisively for a moment.

"I have to see Martha about something," she said, speaking aloud as though she were talking to herself.

Mary O'Flaherty took a pot from the stove and carried it to the sink, where she filled it with water. She carried it back to the stove and lit the gas under it.

"What's that you were saying, Peg?"

"I'm going to run upstairs and see Martha a minute. I have something to tell her. I think I know where she can get a job if she wants one. I just heard footsteps, so she must be up there."

Mary O'Flaherty stood by the stove, looking at the pot of water. She said nothing.

"I'll be down in a minute. I just want to tell her, Mother."

Margaret went out of the kitchen.

When Mary O'Flaherty heard the front door close, she turned from the stove and went to the entrance of the dining room.

"Tom, she went upstairs to talk with that she-devil."

"That one is a bad one," he said.

He put his hand to his stomach and turned his face away from his wife. He grimaced with pain.

III

She was in the parlor, and he wouldn't go in because she was there. He was still mad at her. He was mad at her because she didn't love him any more. Because if she loved him any more she'd pay more attention to him, and she would have paid him more attention when he had his measles. He was all better now, and the sign was off the door, but Mother said

he couldn't go out today because it was raining and wet out.

Danny stood by the clothes tree in the hall by the front door, doing nothing. Aunt Louise was sitting in a chair in the parlor. She was being quiet. The house was quiet. There was nothing to do. He wanted to go and play in the parlor near Aunt Louise. But he wouldn't. He'd get even with her. If she didn't love him any more, then he wouldn't love her any more, either. Mother sometimes said tit for tat. He took a few steps toward the parlor and stood there. But she couldn't see him.

—Tat for you, Aunt Louise, he said silently.

He wanted to cry. He wouldn't cry either.

Some day she'd feel sorry because she didn't love him when he wanted her to love him.

He could see her in the parlor mirror. She was just sitting there; she hardly moved. Her hands were in her lap. She lifted her hand and put it to her hair. She put her hand in her lap again. She was looking out the window, he guessed. He could see the side of her face in the mirror. What was she thinking about? Was she thinking about him? Did she wonder where he was?

He'd go in and not talk to her. This morning she'd walked by him and hadn't said a word.

Aunt Louise sighed.

Danny became alert, waiting for her to say something to him.

He waited.

Scraping his feet, he went into the parlor and sat down on the floor with his back turned to her. Was she looking at him? Had she noticed that he had come in and had not spoken a word to her and was sitting with his back turned to her playing with his baseball pictures?

His pictures were spread out and stacked on the floor. He looked at them. He kept doing this. He didn't want to keep playing with them, but he was waiting for Aunt Louise to talk to him. If she said she was sorry and still loved him, he

wouldn't be mad at her any more. And he'd love her, too.

But she was looking out the window and not noticing him.

He looked at the mirror out of the corner of his eye and watched her as he picked up a picture, and said:

"Ty Cobb."

She didn't look at him.

He picked up another picture and said aloud:

"Eddie Collins."

—Why did he have to come in here today? she asked herself.

The rain made her feel so blue. She didn't want to play with him. There was Mr. Morgan carrying an umbrella. The Morgans lived at Forty-ninth and Indiana. They always spoke to you on the street, and Mr. Morgan always tipped his hat.

She heard Danny get up and stamp out of the room noisily. She wished he wouldn't be so noisy and walk so heavily, but, then, he was only a little boy. When he grew up she might be gone, and he wouldn't even remember her. She could hardly remember anything from the time when she was five and six. He was six now. She wished she were six again instead of twenty.

The rain was coming down harder. A horse and wagon passing. The horse looked so sad in the rain, trudging along slowly, its head lowered. It was a big black horse, and it pulled the wagon as though it were tired.

Danny left the parlor. She was glad. She wanted to be alone.

A streetcar bell was clanging. The driver was slowly turning the horse to the right to get the wagon out of the way of the streetcar. The streetcar went by. The horse and wagon slowly passed. Once her father had her out with his horse and wagon in the rain. She and her father had not spoken and she had gotten so wet and felt so chilled and it had seemed as if she would never get home. That trip had seemed so long, and she had been chilled and cold and had gotten sopping wet, and the rain had beat in on her and on her father. She remembered watching the rain beat down and roll off the back of the

horse. And she remembered her father, so silent, sitting and holding the reins with the rain pelting him in the face. And she had wanted to cry so badly, but she hadn't cried because she was with her father. And she had been so wet, dripping wet, sopping wet when she got home. Her mother had nagged and quarreled with her father about his letting her get wet. She'd felt so sorry for him. She hadn't wanted her mother to nag and fight with him. But she had stood dripping and chilled with the wetness near the stove in the kitchen while they had called each other names.

Now it seemed as if all the unhappiness of that day came back to her. For a moment she could even feel the cold, and she drew her elbows in against her ribs and stiffly hunched up and imagined that she was really having a chill.

And the next day she had caught a cold. And when she had first gotten sick a few years ago her mother had blamed it on her poor father and said it was all because of that time when her father had taken her out in the rain. But she was sure this wasn't so, because she remembered that when she and her father had started out on that ride the sun had been shining. And when it had started to rain he had been so disappointed. She had been sitting there beside her father, sucking on a stick of peppermint candy, a happy little girl. And it had begun to thunder, and then there was lightning and she'd become afraid, because she had seen that her father was afraid. She could still remember how that look had come on his face, and how he blessed himself every time they had seen more lightning in the sky. She'd been afraid she was going to be killed by the lightning. And maybe it was after that that she used to wonder sometimes if everybody thought of dying and was afraid of death.

Danny came into the parlor again. He stood looking at Aunt Louise. Didn't she know he was here? Why didn't she turn and look at him?

She sat a lot like this and didn't talk. She didn't talk to him the way she used to. He took a step toward her and almost

called to her. He stopped. He stared coldly at Aunt Louise, who was still staring at the rain. He turned, picked his baseball pictures off the parlor rug, and, stamping noisily, left the room.

IV

"Mother, why can't I go out and play?"

"Ah, son, the weather's bad. Sure, you can't be going out and getting sick."

"I won't get sick."

"Son, play here in the house."

"There's nothing to do in the house."

"Maybe your Aunt Louise will read you something or tell you a story."

"I don't want her to."

He wished Mother would go in the parlor and tell Aunt Louise to read him a story or play with him.

"You couldn't be letting him out in this weather," Old Tom called in from the dining room.

"That I know, Tom."

Danny went into the dining room. His grandfather sat in a rocking chair by the cot.

"How are you, Father?"

"Ah, sure, and how am I?" the old man asked gently.

Danny was puzzled by Father's answer to his question.

"I'm well enough," the old man said.

"I'm glad, Father."

"What's that you're after sayin', me boy?"

"I said, Father, I'm glad you aren't sick. Father, why were you sick?"

"Sure, the Lord knows."

"Won't He tell you?"

"Won't He tell me what?"

"Won't the Lord tell you why you were sick? You weren't bad, were you, Father?"

Old Tom nodded his head slowly. Danny waited for him to

speaking. Old Tom said nothing. Danny sat on the floor by the dining-room table and began playing with his baseball pictures again.

"Son, why don't you go and play on the floor in the parlor? You'll have more room there."

"I don't want to, Mother. I want to play here, near Father."

"Did you hear that, Tom?"

"What's that you said, Mary?"

"The boy wants to be near you."

"He's a good lad, Mary."

"Joe Tinker," Danny said, picking up one of the baseball pictures.

Old Tom turned to the window.

"Ah, Mary, many'a time I've seen it rain like this in the old country," he said.

Chapter Twenty-one

I

YOU'RE growing, Danny," Father Hunt said warmly, a broad, genial smile on his ruddy face. "You'll soon be going to school with the sisters."

Father Hunt sat by Old Tom, who was lying on the cot in the dining room.

"My friend Arthur Andrews goes to school."

"Do you want to go to school?"

"Yes, but last night Mother said I was too young to walk that far alone."

"You'll be bigger in the fall," Father Hunt said.

"Me boy," Old Tom said.

"What's that you were about to say, Tom?" Father Hunt asked, turning to Old Tom.

"Father, after you. After you, Father," Old Tom said respectfully.

"No, go ahead—what was it you wanted to say, Tom?"

"Father, I was only wantin' to say to the boy that he should get an education. A man needs an education in this country."

"That's true, Tom," Father Hunt said. The priest turned to Danny. "Mark those words, Daniel, and remember them, and remember that a fine man spoke them—your grandfather."

"Yes, Father Hunt," Danny said.

His grandfather was smiling and looked very proud.

"What's that you were playing with on the table there, Danny?" Father Hunt asked.

"They're my baseball pictures."

"I'll bet you a nickel you don't know who Ty Cobb is."

There was a beam in Danny's eyes. He turned to the table, quickly went through the pictures, and handed one to the priest.

"Who's this?" the priest asked.

"Ty Cobb. He plays center field for the Detroit Tigers. They won the pennant last year. They lost the World Series to the Pittsburgh Pirates," Danny proudly said.

"Good. Fine. You're a real baseball fan, Danny." Father Hunt dug into his pockets and drew out some change. "Here," he said, reaching forward, "here's the nickel you've won."

"Mother, look what Father Hunt gave me," Danny shouted as he ran into the front of the apartment.

"Father, there's something I've been wanting to ask you by way of being a favor," Old Tom said respectfully.

"What is it, Tom? Anything, anything I can do for you will be done for the asking."

Old Tom gazed shyly at the priest. He half turned in his sitting position on the cot and pulled something from under his pillow. He reached forward with some crumpled money in his hands and said:

"Father, here's three dollars for a mass for a special intention of me own. Would you please say the mass for me special intention?"

"Tom, you keep that money. I've said the mass for you already. Tom, it's a good number of years we've been friends. I know you and what a fine man you are. Sometimes I know what's on your mind."

Old Tom looked at the priest with awe. Then fear came into his eyes.

"Tom," Father Hunt said in a quiet, comforting voice, "we are clay in the hands of God, and what God wills, that is what happens to us. I offered mass this morning for the intention that if it be God's will you'll recover quickly and be up and kicking about once again."

"Yes, Father," the old man said, listening with deep attention.

"And I'm going to offer another mass tomorrow, and that won't be the last I'll offer until I see you up and about."

"Thank you, Father," Old Tom said with deep gratitude. "Father, you are me friend, as good a friend as a man ever had."

"It's little enough for me to do, Tom, and you must keep your courage up and never despair, never lose your faith in the will of God."

"Never fear, I'll not do that, Father."

Old Tom was clutching the crumpled-up three one-dollar bills. Again he reached forward to give them to the priest.

"Father, please take this."

"No, don't mention it again, Tom."

Old Tom gazed helplessly, but also gratefully, at the priest.

"Now, you're not going to go on worrying, Tom. We all get sick sometime or other in our lives. Last winter I was laid up for one whole month."

Old Tom nodded understandingly.

"You're looking well, and you have plenty of health and strength left in you, so cheer up and try not to worry. That's the first thing you must do, Tom. It's already the month of June. The weather is grand these days, and you'll have to be getting out in it—out in God's fine June sunshine."

"Yes, Father," Old Tom said, almost like a child.

In Old Tom's mind, the idea formed that Father Hunt would save him and cure him. The prayers Father Hunt said, the masses he offered would be powerful appeals before the throne of God. God would hear Father Hunt's prayers, and He would heed them. He saw the priest as though in a halo of goodness. Father Hunt was speaking a word for him before God, asking God's mercy for him, a poor old man.

Many a time hadn't he gone to confession to Father Hunt? No man, no one on the earth knew him like Father Hunt did. Father Hunt must know his mind like a book. And Father Hunt was a merciful man and forgave him his sins, his tempers, and his drinking now and again. Oh, God would forgive

him, too. Ah, it was a wonderful thing that there were priests to go to God for you, and to see you and be your friend in your hour of need. A wonderful thing it was, wonderful. Old Tom felt great joy. He didn't know how he could be afraid. He didn't know how so often of a night he had lain in bed alone in the darkness of the night and sweated in fear and holy terrors.

Never in his life had he met a finer man than Father Hunt. Sure and Father Hunt was a real man of God.

"Tom, you've led a good life. You're a good man. I often think of you, Tom, of men like you and my own father," the priest said.

Old Tom's eyes were misty with tears. To think that a priest like Father Hunt should spend time thinking of the likes of him! Yes, what a good and wonderful man Father Hunt was.

"I often ask myself, Tom, what would the country be and where would it be but for men like yourself and my own father," the priest went on.

Old Tom's eyes opened wide. He had never believed that the likes of himself was important in this world. What was he but a poor old man, a poor old greenhorn who couldn't read or write?

"Tom, it was work, hard work that made this country what it is today. The hard work you've done, and many others, too. The hard work my father did, God have mercy on his soul."

"May his soul rest in peace, Father," Old Tom said. "He was a Kerry man, wasn't he, Father?"

"Yes, he was a Kerry man."

"Sure, Father, he must be a proud one indeed a proud father in Heaven looking down and seeing all the good you do here on earth," Old Tom said.

"None of us are as good as we could be, Tom."

"That's the truth. Sure, don't I sometimes lie here and think of just that meself, Father. Didn't I drink too many cans of beer of a Saturday night in me day?"

"My father liked his can of beer himself, Tom, and it didn't do him too much harm."

"It didn't, you say, Father?" Tom asked with interest.

Father Hunt smiled understandingly.

"He wanted you to be a priest, Father, and gave you a fine education?"

"My mother, too, God have mercy on her soul. She did. I guess, Tom, that it was because of her that I received my call."

"She must have been a saint."

"She was a fine woman, Tom." The priest smiled kindly. "But she raised a bit of the devil with my father now and then if he didn't keep on the line."

"Like my Mary, I suppose."

The priest got up.

"I have to be going, Tom. But I'll be coming back to see you, and God bless you, Tom."

"Thank you, Father," Tom said.

He looked at Father Hunt with gratitude and disappointment. He didn't want to see the priest leaving.

II

It had all been different just a little while ago when his friend Father Hunt had been with him. An uneducated man like himself didn't have the words for putting it, but it had all seemed not what it was now. Father Hunt made everything clear to him, but now the pain had come back again and he was fearful and alone.

Was God punishing him for his sins? But there was never a sin, no, nary a sin he ever committed that he could think of that he hadn't confessed and been given absolution for.

His pain was dull and steady. They said it was nothing, for him not to worry about it, and Dr. O'Donnell said that, too, and that he was old, that's all, and that his insides shrank and that gave him more gas in the stomach. Gas? Gas, was it? It was gas they were telling to him. They couldn't fool him and pull the wool over his eyes. For didn't he know that soon he

was going to die? He would be passing away and they would be taking his poor old remains out to Calvary Cemetery. They would if Father Hunt wasn't able to save him. Ah, Father Hunt was his friend and the finest man he'd ever met.

"How are you feeling, Tom?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, coming into the dining room from the kitchen.

"Oh, I'm feeling good, good, Mary," he said, making an effort to talk so that she would believe him.

Ah, to be sick and old and taken care of by women, was that a good end for a man?

"Father Hunt is a fine man," she said.

"That he is."

He didn't want to talk with Mary now. He didn't want to talk with anyone.

"His mother must be proud of him—to have a son who is a walking saint of God," Mary O'Flaherty went on.

Old Tom felt very tired. He wished Mary would be quiet.

"His mother is dead, isn't she, Tom?"

"Yes, Mary, that she is."

"Well, she must be looking down on him from Heaven."

"Yes, Mary," Old Tom said wearily.

He sank back on the pillow and closed his eyes. With Father Hunt's prayers he'd be getting back his strength. He'd take a ride on the Fifty-first Street Car and have a can of beer at the end of the line with his friends. He could see himself lifting the can and passing it to O'Gara. O'Gara was a good man—a Westmeath man, at that.

"Tom, will I put the window shade down so that the sun won't get in your eyes?"

What was she after saying? He didn't want to be talking. He grew drowsier.

What was he after thinking? O'Gara. Yes, O'Gara. O'Gara . . .

A burning pain flamed in his abdomen. He gritted his teeth and closed his lips tightly so as not to cry out.

The pains were like fire, the fires of Hell. Was this what Hell was, the flames licking your insides?

The pain ebbed. Thank God. It was Father Hunt's prayer and his blessing.

He dozed off to sleep. Mary O'Flaherty pulled down the window shade and tiptoed out of the room.

Chapter Twenty-two

I

HE DIDN'T like Father to be sick. He didn't like it when Father had pains. But he liked having Father Hunt come to see Father and talk to him. Father Hunt had praised him for knowing the names of all the baseball players he had pictures of and knowing the teams they played on. He wished he had pictures of all the baseball players who played in the big leagues. That would be something.

The doorbell rang.

Danny sprang to his feet from the parlor floor and ran to the door. His grandmother was there too.

"Who can be comin' to see us at this time of a Sunday morning?" she asked, speaking aloud to herself.

She opened the door. Jim O'Neill and Bill were standing in front of her. Danny's eyes lit up for a second and then his expression changed. He stepped back.

"Hello, Dan," Bill said.

"Oh, my son-in-law," Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Hello, Mary," Jim said in a restrained voice as he and Bill stepped into the apartment. He was startled at the sight of Danny in his white suit and white stockings and long curls.

This was no goddamned get-up for a boy.

"Pa and I came to take you to the ball game. The White Sox are playing today in their new ball park, the new Comiskey Park," Bill said proudly.

Danny didn't answer. He drew back a few steps further, uncertain, afraid of his father, and afraid that with his father here there might be some kind of trouble. When he'd seen his

father at the door, he'd been afraid his father had come to take him home, away from home, away from Mother. But Papa wasn't going to do that. Papa was only going to take him to the ball game.

Papa put his hand on Danny's shoulders, and Danny flinched a trifle. But Papa spoke in a voice that wasn't at all angry and said:

"Hello, Danny. I've come to take you to a ball game with your brother here."

II

Old Tom sat in a chair by the cot in the dining room.

Jim was speechless with hurt. He wasn't saying anything to Old Tom for fear he would give away his feelings. He hadn't expected to see the old man looking like this. Why, he looked like death. He hoped the old man hadn't noticed his face when he'd first come into the room, because his face must have shown his shock. He hated to see the old man so sick. For the third or fourth time in the last minute or two he told himself the old man must be dying. That look on poor Old Tom's face must be the look of death.

"Well, Jim, how does it go with you?"

"Oh, Tom, everything is the same with me."

"You're feelin' well, Jim?"

"I'm feeling pretty good. I can't complain about my health," Jim answered.

His health and strength, and his size, too, with his big broad shoulders, seemed to him an insult to the old man.

"Jim, Jim, let me give you a cup of coffee," Mary O'Flaherty said, hoping excitedly about his chair.

"All right, thank you, Mary."

"You're a good man. Jim. You're a good, hard-working man," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"And Lizz and the children?"

"She's well. She's up and about and she'll be bringing the new little fellow, Little Robert, up to see you soon."

"I've been wanting to get down to see me new grandson," Old Tom said.

"I know, Tom, but if you haven't been feeling too well, you shouldn't," Jim said very gently.

"Robert is a fine name, a grand name, and he must be six months old already! Sure, time flies, and I haven't seen the baby since his baptism," Mary O'Flaherty said. •

She went into the kitchen to get Jim a cup of coffee.

"So you're taking the boys to a baseball game, Jim?" Old Tom asked.

"Yes—it's a fine Sunday, and I thought I'd take the two of them."

"Well, have a good time, Jim. They're both good boys, lads a father can be proud of."

The old man's words cut into him. He'd awakened this morning thinking of Danny. The new baby, another son, had somehow brought Danny to his mind. He'd stopped in the center of the room at home, and he'd suddenly realized how little he saw of Danny. And he thought of his own father, and how sometimes he remembered his own father with such anger, and, yes, maybe hatred. He didn't want any of his kids to feel that way about him when they grew up. He'd felt low this morning, and then he'd lost his head and been so goddamned sore. If Lizz hadn't been at church he'd have picked a fight with her, because he felt that letting Danny go to live with her people had been her doing. And then he'd cooled off and made up his mind to take Bill and Danny to the ball game.

Coming up here to get Danny he'd felt good, but now this house did something to him. He wanted to get out of it.

"Ah, as soon as I'm up and about, Jim, I'll have to have you take me to see a baseball game and explain what it's about."

• "We'll be sure to do that, Tom," Jim said in his gentle voice.

He wondered if Old Tom would ever be up and about again. His sadness deepened.

"I've been nigh onto forty-five or fifty years in America, Jim, and I never saw a ball game except in the park."

"You haven't, Tom?"

"No, Jim, I haven't."

"I'll have to take you to see one. You'll like baseball, Tom."

"Indeed I will."

"Here, Jim, you good man, here's a cup o' coffee for you, and is there anything else I can fix you? Some eggs maybe? Did you have your breakfast, Jim?"

"No, thank you, this is all I want, Mary."

"Ah, you're a good man, Jim. How is me daughter Lizz?"

"She's well."

"I must be hying meself down to see her and Robert. Robert is a fine name, a fine name."

Jim turned to the table to drink his coffee. Picking up the white china pitcher, he thought of how they used real cream here instead of canned and condensed milk. He rarely had cream in his coffee.

The pallor on Old Tom's face. Old Tom had aged in a few months. His eyes were a little sunken now, and he had lost weight. His thin wrists, with the veins sticking out. And the tired way he talked. Yes, he couldn't help but think the old man was really dying.

"Me friend, Father Hunt, comes to pay me a visit now and again," Old Tom said in a proud voice.

"He does?"

"He's a fine man, and he understands a workin' man, Jim."

"A lot don't."

"Indeed they don't—they get to makin' money and wearin' fancy clothes and I tell you, Jim, they don't understand a workin' man."

He thought of his brother-in-law Al. Al was at church. Al always went to ten or eleven o'clock mass. He himself always went to an early mass. Somehow he felt that he belonged at an early mass instead of at ten or eleven o'clock mass. The

dudes and the lawyers, and doctors and businessmen all went to mass at ten or eleven o'clock.

"Sure, and I don't have the education to talk like Father Hunt, Jim, but the way he explains to me, like he explains what would the country be but for those who did all of the work."

"Yes, Tom."

"I've seen it—I've seen many a man doin' hard work in me day, and so have you, Jim."

"Yes, I have. I've done it myself."

"Ah, when your family grows up, Jim, you'll be able to retire and take it easy."

"I'll have a right to, Tom."

"Indeed you will, Jim."

"Is your coffee hot enough, Jim?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"Yes, thanks, Mary."

"I always say, Jim, you're one of the finest men there is," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Thank you, Mary," Jim said, embarrassed by her praise.

The front door opened. In growing excitement, Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed:

"Here's me son."

Jim felt himself growing tense.

III

"You're looking fine, Father," Al said as he came into the room.

"I'm feeling better," Old Tom mumbled.

"That's what you want to say—that's the mental outlook to have, Dad," Al said with a cheerfulness that did not ring quite true.

Old Tom didn't answer.

Jim didn't like the way Al talked to the old man; it sounded like salesman's talk to him.

And he was getting more uncomfortable sitting here. He just didn't like being in this house. He didn't belong here.

And, damn it, a kid of his e'dn't belong here either. A few minutes ago he'd almost boiled up and said something when his brother-in-law had sent his two kids to the store. Al had given the kids orders like a boss, and you might have thought that he was the kids' father if you didn't know. And the old lady, goddamn it, talking on and on as if Dan were her son and she owned the kid.

"And, Jim, how are things going with you and Lizz—Elizabeth?"

Jim was slow in answering. He kept wishing the kids would get back from the store so he could be off to the ball game with them.

"Oh, things are going along all right."

Salesman's talk. You couldn't sell the idea of health to a dying old man the way you could sell a pair of shoes. Hell, when his brother-in-law Al was finished selling a pair of shoes, what the hell could he do? Could he do anything with a pair of shoes? Could he put half soles on a pair of shoes? He had to remember to fix Bill's shoes next Sunday.

He wished the two kids would come back.

"Al, Al," the old man exclaimed.

"Yes, Dad?"

"Did Father Hunt say ten o'clock mass?"

"Yes, he did."

"And he gave a good sermon?"

"He did. Superb. He has a fine delivery."

The old man smiled with pride and gratification.

Watching Old Tom, Jim thought how one day he'd be old, too. The old man had spoken of how he could retire. Al supported the old man and the old lady. Wasn't he a good son? He kept them here in this steam-heated apartment, and they could live in comfort in their old age. If his sons did as well for him as Al was doing, shouldn't he be a satisfied father when his time came? Hell, Al might put on the dog and act like a dude, but he was a good son, wasn't he? Jim guessed that Al was the best of the O'Flaherty children.

Al turned to Jim.

"Jim, some Sunday you should come up here to mass at Crucifixion Church and hear Father Hunt speak. He has the manner of a real orator. Why, he can preach a sermon with a delivery and a style as good as any Jesuit. He's a real Demosthenes."

Why in hell, Jim asked himself, couldn't Al talk more human. He felt his anger rising.

How far had he sent those two kids? He wanted to get out of this house fast.

IV

Danny held his father's hand but wished that he didn't have to. He didn't say anything.

"I want to see the Tigers win," Bill said.

"Why?"

"I'm a Cub fan, Pa, just like you."

"Who you for, Dan?" Bill asked.

"I don't know."

He was for the White Sox but he didn't want to say it.

Jim looked down at his curly-haired son. Christ, they had him dressed like a little dude or a little sissy, with his white sailor suit, his white stockings, and his black patent-leather shoes. And they still had him wearing long curls down his back so that he looked like a girl. His rancor rose, because he remembered the bitter fight he'd had with Lizz over Danny's curls about a year or two ago.

They crossed over on Indiana Avenue and waited for the streetcar. Jim could see the old lady watching them from her parlor window. She acted as if she didn't trust him with his own son.

If his own mother had lived, wouldn't she be proud of her grandchildren? How much he still missed his mother!

"Here's the car, Pa," Danny said.

"I see it," Jim answered curtly.

Danny froze up.

Jim knew he'd been short with his son. He hadn't meant to be.

His own mother. She would have loved her grandchildren. Why couldn't she have lived?

Jim and the two boys stepped off the curb and, walking toward the tracks, Jim flagged the approaching streetcar.

v

"Did the game start?" Danny asked.

"No, it's only the White Sox in batting practice," Bill answered knowingly.

"It's a long time yet before they'll be playing," Jim said.

"How long, Papa?"

"Over an hour."

"Don't you like it, Dan?" Bill asked.

"Yes," Danny said, wishing he weren't here.

The White Sox wore white uniforms, and they had white stockings like he wore. They were batting the ball in practice. He could hear the crack, crack each time they hit the ball.

He couldn't see too well. These were called pavilion seats. They cost fifty cents. The baseball field was big. The baseball players on the field looked small. When they hit the ball and it went smack, he heard the smack, but sometimes he didn't see the ball.

"Who's that hittin' 'em now, Pa?"

Jim looked closely.

"I guess that's Pat Daugherty, Bill." Jim turned to Danny on his right. "Do you know who Pat Daugherty is?"

"Yes, he plays left field."

"I told you that, Dan," Bill said.

"Yes, I know. Why don't the White Sox wear their blue suits?"

"That's their road suits when they ain't playin' at home."

"Why do they have white suits for home?"

"Every team does."

Jim's answer to Danny was drowned out in a cheer. Jim

and others around them watched as the ball traveled toward the centerfield fence.

"If they could only do that in the game."

"Hell, Lee Tannehill won't pole one like that in a game," a man said.

"Tannehill sometimes gets a holt on one and sends it out," Jim said to the fan.

Dan wasn't interested. The seat was hard. It was a bench, and there was no back to it. And he was squeezed in between Papa and another man so that he was scared to move.

"Can't you sit still?" the man beside Danny said.

"He won't bother you," Jim said to the man.

Papa's voice sounded angry, and Danny was afraid. He'd try to sit very still.

"Here, now, sit still and watch. Don't you like it?" Papa asked him.

"Yes."

He wanted to look at the people. People kept coming in and moving around and they shouted and it was noisy, and there was the smack of a batter hitting the ball and another cheer.

"Now we'll see Ty Cobb," Jim said.

"Where's Ty Cobb?" Danny asked, his face lighting up with interest.

He looked eagerly out and down on the field. He saw the White Sox players trotting and walking in off the field.

"I can't see him," Danny said.

"He hasn't come out on the field yet," Jim said.

Danny's expression changed.

Gray-suited players started to emerge from the players' bench off on the other side of the field. Suddenly there were roars, cheers, and hisses. The noise and shouting bewildered him.

"There's Ty," Jim said.

Danny looked, still confused and bewildered by the noise and the shouting. He saw Detroit players in their gray uniforms but he didn't know which one was Ty Cobb. He

squirmed restlessly and wanted to ask his father when the game would begin, but he didn't. He was afraid to ask Papa a lot of questions, just as he was afraid to ask Uncle Al a lot of questions.

He heard the smack of the batting.

"Has the game begun?" he asked.

"No, that's just Detroit having its batting practice," his father answered.

He squirmed again and accidentally kicked the man beside him. The man looked at him sharply but said nothing. The man brushed his trousers where Danny's shoe had touched them.

"Dan, that's Ty Cobb at bat now," Bill called to him.

He sensed the excitement of the men around him. He looked at the batter's box, far away on the field, and saw a ballplayer in a gray suit standing at home plate in a slightly crouched position, with the bat on his shoulder, and he knew it was Ty Cobb. But the players looked far away and small, and Ty Cobb, swinging his bat and hitting the ball on the ground, looked just like all the other players.

"You ain't no Georgia peach, you're just a lemon," a man near him shouted loudly.

He looked, blinking his eyes.

"Ty was no lemon yesterday, going from second to home on an infield out and winning the game for the Tigers," a man said.

"He wouldn't have gotten away with it if Chick Gandil wasn't so dumb," another man said.

"Do you like it, Dan?" Jim asked with some eagerness.

"Yea," Danny answered.

The crowd and the men talking and shouting, and some men yelling like they were mad and angry all made him wish he was home and out playing in the back yard or on Indiana Avenue. He wished Papa hadn't brought him to the ball game.

"The game's young yet," said a fan near Danny.

Squirming, Danny looked at the big sky. His face was smeared with grayish streaks of dirt, and his clothes were crumpled. They were getting dirty.

A roar went up. Players were running on the field. He didn't know what was happening, except that the White Sox were losing 5 to 0.

"Only one run in," a fan said.

"The game's young yet. It's only the fifth inning."

He squirmed again. He looked at the big sky. He glanced down at the cement floor. He stared at the back of the man in front of him. The man's white shirt was coming out of his pants.

"Ty Cobb comes up for the Tigers," Bill said.

Danny didn't care. He looked out at the field. He couldn't see it clearly.

"Here's your crackerjack, Dan."

Jim handed him a box of crackerjack.

What prize would he get in the box? He spilled crackerjack as he started wolfing it.

The whole field was a moving blur of baseball players in gray and white uniforms.

He wanted the White Sox to win, but he wanted the game over. It was a rally. Everybody was talking all around him and Papa wasn't paying much attention to him.

"Here's your Lee Tannehill now with the bags loaded," a fan sneered.

Danny stopped squirming and looked down at the field. He wanted to see what was going to happen.

"Sit still," the man next to him said.

It was very quiet. The men all around him were watching. Papa was leaning forward. The men were so quiet that he was afraid. It was like they all would get mad and start fighting,

even worse than Uncle Al and the rest of them at home sometimes fought.

"

The pitcher threw the ball. He heard the crack of the bat.

A roar swept out across the field. The men all around him sprang to their feet. They were shouting and yelling and waving their arms. The yelling made him feel like he was sick when he wasn't sick—as if he'd fall down if he got up.

"Yeah!" a man boomed behind him.

"Stand up, Dan," Jim snapped excitedly.

Danny stood up on his seat to see what it was. He saw White Sox players trotting around the bases.

"A fluke," a man said in disgust.

"That's all right, brother. In this game, it's runs what counts."

"Say, we've seen something historic," a fan said. "We've seen Lee Tannehill hit the first home run in Comiskey Park—and with the bases loaded, too."

"The score's tied, Dan," Jim said.

The men sat down. All around him they were talking fast. He was glad the Sox had tied the score, but he wished he had seen it happen. He'd better not ask Papa again how much longer the game would last. Papa might get sore.

"Three outs," Bill called.

"Dan, do you want some more crackerjack?" Papa asked him.

"Yes, please."

Another roar escaped from the fans.

"Ed Walsh is walking out to the mound," Bill said.

A man with something that looked like a horn and was called a megaphone was standing down near home base and talking into the megaphone.

"For Chicago, Walsh now pitching."

He wished he could talk through a megaphone.

VII

When a day was getting over with and going away, and it was suppertime, he sometimes had this he-didn't-know-how-he-felt feeling. He gripped Papa's hand tightly, because he was afraid he'd get lost in the crowd of men on this street outside the ball park. They were shoving and pushing by. If he got lost, he'd look for a policeman.

"Did you like the game, Dan?"

"Yes, Papa, I did. I wished the White Sox didn't lose."

"Well, when you grow up you'll have something to remember."

"Pa," Bill said, "Ty Cobb's home run to win the game was as historic as Tannehill's. Six to five for the Tigers. Am I glad, Papa!"

They turned the corner outside Comiskey Park at Thirty-fifth Street and Shields. As the crowd poured along, crowded streetcars pushed through. The street was a confusion, with men weaving and dodging in front and between the streetcars, horse-drawn carriages, and automobiles. A motorman dinged his bell.

"I'm glad you liked the game, Dan," Jim said gently.

Sometimes Papa talked different from Uncle Al. Now he wasn't afraid of Papa.

"Comiskey Park, the home of the White Sox," Bill said as though he were giving a recitation.

All of these strange people here going home from the game.

—Never trust a stranger.

He had heard Mother say that.

Off to the west of Shields Avenue, over the railroad tracks, high, but not too high, the sun was going down. Danny took a quick look at it. He didn't want it to go down. He wanted to go near to it. He wished some day he could go there to the sun, like they told him some men like Peary went to the North Pole.

A tall man blotted out the sun. Papa pulled at his hand and said:

"Come on, don't tag along."

He quickened his steps. Papa had long legs. He walked too fast. Uncle Al walked fast too. Where did all of these people come from?

A crowded streetcar passed. Men stood on the platform step, clinging to the rails.

The crowd confused him, and he wished he were out of it. He wanted to be home. He didn't like Papa to take him out like this.

"I think I'll take you home and let you see your little brother," Jim said, a sudden note of resolution in his voice.

Danny went pale.

"You have to know your brothers and sisters better. They're your own family."

Danny didn't answer. Mother would be mad. Maybe she'd fight with Papa when Papa did take him home after taking him down to see Mama and his new baby brother. Maybe Papa would never bring him back and would make him live on LaSalle Street with the rest of them. He couldn't cry in front of Papa. He couldn't cry now because if he did Papa would know why he was crying and get sore, sore and mad as the Devil himself.

Tall, broad-shouldered, and looking as though his dark black ill-fitting Sunday suit didn't belong on him, Jim walked on in the crowd, holding his two oldest sons by the hands.

Danny saw all the legs and swinging arms. Why did Papa want to take him to LaSalle Street now? He wanted to go home to Mother.

VIII

"Of course, Jim, I'm glad you brought my Danny boy back to see me, but what will my mother say?"

Lizz sat in the dining room, her left breast exposed as she nursed her newborn infant son. Danny didn't like it, seeing

his new baby brother being fed at Mama's breasts. He thought of going into the front to play with Little Margaret. When he was a little baby he did that, got milk from Mama's breast. It almost made him mad. Why did God make it that way? It was like oysters. Oysters looked like milk that would make you maybe sick if you ate them. He couldn't look at oysters. Last week he saw Aunt Louise over a pot of oysters in the kitchen at home and he had to look away so he wouldn't get sick and throw up.

He didn't want to play with Little Margaret. When she was born, they'd sent him up to live at Mother's—Mother's was home.

"After all, I'm the kid's father. A father has rights by law," Jim said with half-restrained emotion.

"I know, Jim, but my mother will worry. She'll wonder what happened to Danny boy."

"What about my worrying?"

They were going to have a fight over him. He hoped Papa wouldn't hit Mama. He hoped Papa wouldn't hit him.

He went back and stood watching Papa and Mama. He heard Bill and Little Margaret and Dennis mumbling in the front.

"I'm sayin'," Jim said, his voice almost rising to a tone of melodrama, "I'm sayin' that that boy is my son and I have my rights over him as a father."

Lizz held the baby over her shoulder and gently patted its back with the palm of her plump right hand.

"Oh, my little precious. My little precious was so hungry."

Mama didn't care for him. Mother did. He wished Mother had been his real mother instead of his grandmother.

"Jim, you'd better take him back up to my mother," Lizz said.

"Why?" Jim asked, his voice strained in anger.

"She'll be worried, and she might even telephone the police."

Jim was gripped by a speechless anger.

"Jim, you can't do that to my old mother," Lizz went on.

"Pa?" Bill called, coming into the dining room.

"Get the hell out of here," Jim barked at Bill.

Bill hurried back into the front room.

Danny cowered. If Papa told him to get the hell out of here, he'd tell Papa that it was Papa who had brought him here. He didn't know if he would or if he wouldn't tell that to Papa, but that was what he'd like to tell him.

"The hell with your mother."

"Say, you, don't you talk that way about my mother."

The baby began to bawl.

"See, you made him cry."

"Ah, don't give me that," Jim said.

Danny wanted to play with Bill, or do something, but he stood fixed, listening when he didn't want to be listening, his round face dirty, his hands dirty, his suit and stockings dirty.

Jim turned from Lizz and noticed Danny.

"What the hell are you doin' here?"

Danny couldn't answer. He was locked up in fear. Then, after a moment's pause while his father looked angrily at him and he was afraid that Papa was going to sock him, he said:

"You took me here."

"It's mine," Little Margaret yelled in the front of the house.

Dennis screamed. The baby screamed. Jim stared angrily at Danny. Danny faced his father.

Jim raised his hand and took a step toward Danny.

The infant continued to bawl and Little Margaret and Dennis were fighting. Danny waited for the blow to come.

Jim stopped and let his long arms drop awkwardly to his side. Holding her crying infant in her arms, and with her large left breast exposed, Lizz moved toward Jim.

"Don't you dare lay a hand on my son, Jim O'Neill, or I'll take a knife to you."

Danny felt like he was sick.

"Do you hear me, Jim O'Neill?"

Jim stared at Lizz.

"How can I hear you in this madhouse?"

"Hey, you shysters, keep quiet," Lizz yelled to the front.

Then she rocked little Robert in her arms and said to the infant in a low cooing voice:

"Oh, Mama's precious doesn't want to cry."

Danny, still feeling as if he might be sick, stared at his mother's exposed breast with fascination and wonder.

The infant stopped screaming. The other children in the front of the house quieted down.

Big and ungainly, Jim stood in the center of the dining room.

Looking up from the infant, Lizz said to Jim quietly:

"Jim, you'd better give Danny a bite of supper and then take him back to my mother's."

"Are you hungry?" Jim asked Danny.

"No."

He couldn't eat even if they tried to make him.

He wanted to go home to Mother, and he was waiting for Papa to say he'd take him home. He'd been afraid Papa had brought him here to keep him here.

"You'd better have a bite to eat before I take you back home," Jim said, his voice no longer angry.

IX

He'd really been a damned fool. He knew that he'd brought the kid back home intending to keep him there, and he knew that he couldn't do it. If he did, he'd never have another minute's peace. Lizz and her mother and her whole family, all of them, would be on his neck.

They were riding on a half-empty southbound Wentworth Avenue streetcar. It was dark out. Wentworth Avenue looked very lonely.

"Do you like it at your grandmother's, Dan?" Jim asked shyly.

"Ycs."

"Why do you like it better than living with us, your own family?"

"I don't know."

Jim bit his lower lip.

This ride with Danny was almost as painful as that ride three years ago when he'd taken the boy, screaming, back to his grandmother's. He knew now that he'd had some hope then of getting Danny back. Now he could see that he'd lost this son of his. It was almost as though Danny weren't his own son. He felt like getting stinking drunk tonight.

He noticed the absorbed expression on the boy's face. What was going on in his mind? He wanted to talk to Danny, but he couldn't. He grew impatient for the ride to be over with.

Danny twisted in the seat.

"We'll be at your grandmother's soon," Jim said.

Danny liked having the motorman keep putting his foot on the bell. Gee, how he'd like to drive the car, with his hand on the motorman's brake, making the car go faster, slower, stopping the car, starting it, stamping his foot on the bell, telling horses and automobiles and everything to get out of his way. Gee!

Papa. Papa was sad. He would like to tell Papa not to be sad. Why were grownups ever sad? They didn't have to be, did they? Not unless they were sick like Father. Father was sick. They whispered about Father being sick but stopped every time he came around. Father had something they didn't want him to know about, but he knew the name of what Father was sick with.

—Cancer, cancer, cancer, cancer, he silently sing-songed to himself.

It was about time that the motorman stamped the bell again.

—Ding, ding, ding, get out of my way, here I come, ding, ding, ding, get out of my way.

He knew why a kid was unhappy. It was because of the grownups fighting and making you afraid of something. But you got afraid of something because you were a child and not a grownup. That was why he wanted to be a grownup and not a little boy, because then he wouldn't be afraid and he

could do what he wanted to do and not have to always do what he was told.

—Ding, ding, ding, ding, ~~ding~~, here I come, everybody get out of my way, Danny said, his lips moving as he spoke to himself.

“What’s that you said, Danny?” Jim asked.

“Nothing, Papa,” Danny answered.

He didn’t want Papa to know about his thoughts and what he said to himself. He didn’t want any grownup to know. This was his secret, and sometimes he even wished that God didn’t know, but God did, because God knew everything.

Chapter Twenty-three

I

GOING out at night this way with that married man, and Pa sick. Lizz, I tell you, the life is hardly in him."

"I know, I know, Mother. I'm saying a novena for him."

"The poor man, he's sleeping and resting easy now, but some nights we're up half the night with his pains. And to see him suffer—it would make your heart bleed, it would, Lizz."

They sat, solemnly saying nothing. .

"The time comes for everyone, and if it's Pa's time, Pa will have to go," Mary O'Flaherty said. .

"Maybe God will spare him. Mother, Christ who raised the dead can save my father. Oh, I won't stop praying for God's mercy." .

"You're good, Lizz, you're a good girl."

Lizz smiled with pleasure.

"Mother, my Jim feels so badly about my father."

"What does Jim think of that black Protestant devil?"

"Oh, Jim could fix him, my Jim could. Mother, if you want Lorry Robinson beaten up, you just say the word to my Jim."

"I'll pay him half a dollar, a half a dollar of me son's hard-earned money, if he'll beat up that Protestant limb of Satan."

"Oh, Mother, Jim wouldn't want anything for it. My Jim is a proud man." .

"You tell him to beat him up."

"He will. You should see the way my Jim can fight, Mother."

"Ah, there are times when I wish I was a man meself. I

should have been born a man," Mary O'Flaherty said dramatically. "Ah, she'll be out, Lizz, 'til all hours. Well, God will curse her. God will curse the two of them."

"Mother, you and I have been pure women," Lizz said, nodding her head as she spoke.

"If me holy sister, a nun of God, knew, it would break me poor sister's heart," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Mother, he never could ruin me the way he's ruined my sister."

"Ah, he wouldn't be wanting the likes of you," Mary O'Flaherty told her daughter.

"Say . . ." Lizz began.

But they both heard. Old Tom was moaning loudly.

"Glory be to God, it's Pa," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Get the holy water bottle, Mother," Lizz said quickly.

"Help!" Old Tom cried.

"Go to your father," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Lizz rose and hurried to her father's bedroom.

Mary O'Flaherty went to her room and came back with a bottle of holy water and a holy candle. She set the holy water bottle and the candle on the dresser.

"Oh, I forgot me matches," she said. She scurried back to the kitchen.

Tom moaned.

"Oh, Father, we'll pray for you," Lizz said.

"It's me insides," he feebly explained.

Mary returned with a box of matches and a saucer. She lit the candle, dripped wax into the saucer, and placed the burning candle in it.

Lizz grabbed the holy water bottle and, wetting her fingers, kept making the sign of the cross over Tom.

Mary took the bottle from Lizz and wet Tom's forehead.

Lizz knelt before the burning candle, blessed herself, and said Hail Marys aloud.

Old Tom's hands went to his stomach.

"Mary, Mary . . ."

He couldn't go on. His face was twisted in pain. Lizz rose and stepped over to his bed.

"Snakes," he said, gasping out the word between agonized moans. "Stop them!"

Suddenly Old Tom lay quiet. He gazed with childlike, trusting eyes at his wife, and then he looked at Lizz. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. His face was thin, sunken, and tortured.

II

They sat in the hotel room. Margaret's hair fell down her back. Lorry, a tall, handsome man with dark hair, was in his shirtsleeves, and his shirt was open at the top. His collar was off. He looked drowsy. Margaret yawned and puffed on a cigarette. It must be getting late, she thought, but she didn't want to go home.

It had been such a wonderful night. She had been so happy in his arms. And she had made him happy, too. And what a wonderful dinner they had had. No, she didn't want to go home tonight—or ever. She wanted to be with him night after night.

If she stayed with Lorry, what would they say, what would her mother say? Would her mother call her a whore and a hussy? If she came home with money, her mother damned well wouldn't.

"Peg, I don't love my wife," Lorry said.

Margaret was about to tell him how she felt about his wife. She didn't. It was better not to. A man, even as wonderful a man as Lorry, might resent that. Tonight she mustn't do anything that would spoil it between them. Oh, would she ever forget his kiss tonight?

If he would only ask her now to stay here with him. She wouldn't care what her mother said. She wouldn't care what the world said. She listened to the ticking of the clock on his dresser. She told herself that she had to go.

She struggled with herself not to cry. She had tried not to,

but she could feel the tears coming from her heart. She couldn't hold them back; she couldn't hold back her sorrow.

"Peg, Peg, what's the matter?"

Her head was bent down, and with tear-filled eyes she was staring at the red carpet on the hotel room floor.

Lorry wondered what had made her cry. In the face of a woman's tears, you felt damned near helpless. They were like a threat to you. He wanted her to stop; he didn't like her crying like this. But he felt a sympathy for her. The sight of her, with her head bent, crying, her shoulders shaking a little, made him feel sorry for her. She loved him, and after all, look at the way he had to treat her, seeing her so rarely. He wouldn't see her again until January. He made a start, as though to get up and go to her. He knew he ought to do this, and he thought she wanted him to. He wanted to himself, and yet he didn't, and he sat back in his chair hoping she would stop crying and cheer up.

Peg was still sobbing, still staring at the red carpet on the hotel room floor. He went to her and took her in his arms gently.

She stopped crying.

"I'm sorry, Lorry," she said meekly. "Please forgive me and don't think badly of me. I couldn't help crying. It's my nerves, it's my nerves, oh . . . it's just everything," Margaret said.

"I know, Peg. I know."

"Don't think I'm not brave, Lorry darling, because I am. I'm a brave girl."

"I know you are, Peg," he said, his voice gentle.

Oh, she loved his voice, she loved it so much when he talked like this.

"Oh, if you knew how much I put up with—if you could see that home of mine." She paused and stared vacantly at the rug. "Home!" she exclaimed bitterly.

She struggled not to give way to her tears again. Then she looked up with a sad, troubled smile on her face.

"My father is dying. My sister is dying. They'll both be dead in a year."

She sobbed again, and then added:

"Oh, everything, everything's wrong."

She had been so happy tonight. It had seemed like the happiest night of her life. And now everything was so dark and black, and her life was so wretched.

She stared at the carpet again and slowly shook her head from side to side.

Lorry went over to her and lifted up her face.

"Peg, what is it? What's the matter?"

—I don't want to go home, she thought.

III

They rode in a horse-drawn carriage with the shades down. Peg thought how wonderful it was of Lorry to take her home. Suddenly Lorry took her in his arms, held her tightly, and kissed her passionately. Breathlessly he said:

"Peg, I love you."

She raised her left hand and stroked his face. She felt herself growing soft, as though she were melting away. She heard the clop of the horses' hoofs on the pavement.

She stroked his face while he kissed her.

"I love you, Peg," he repeated in a hot, panting breath.

It was like something wild and wonderful happening inside her. It was like finding the happiness she had always wanted and had never expected. His kisses, his strong arms around her so tightly that she could hardly breathe with her corsets pressing into her flesh, the smell of him, his breath, his lips, his tongue, and his telling her he loved her.

The world was narrowed down to herself and Lorry in the carriage with the shades drawn.

IV

"It's late, Lizz. You'd better go home to Jim and your little ones," Mary O'Flaherty told her daughter.

"Mother, I go home and leave my poor sick father! Never! No, I'm not that kind of a daughter. He needs me."

"He's quiet now," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"He was glad to see me," Lizz said proudly.

Louise sat at the kitchen table, staring at her older sister. Her father's moaning had awakened her. She wore a blue kimono, and her auburn hair fell down her back. There were hollows beneath her eyes. Mary O'Flaherty turned to Louise and said quietly:

"Oh, you poor girl, you should be getting your rest."

"We're all tired, Mother," Louise answered.

"Mother, it was my prayers, our prayers, that stopped Pa's pains."

"Poor man, I never in me livelong life saw him suffer so much."

Mary O'Flaherty looked at the clock.

"It's late, and she's still out with that married man."

"Oh, Mother, Peg has a right to have a good time," Louise said in a tired but somewhat peevish voice.

"He's just another good-time Charlie," Lizz said. "That's all he is, Mother."

"It's not right," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"I'll make some tea, Mother," Lizz said.

"Ah, don't be bothering. It's time you were leaving, you poor thing, with that long ride home. Sure, Jim will be worrying about you."

"He'll be sleeping."

"But who'll be taking care of the little ones?"

"I'll be home in time to let him go to work. I can't go and leave my father suffering, my dear old father."

"Ah, maybe he'll rest easy for the night. But how the poor man suffers. It almost breaks me heart."

"If God makes him suffer now, God will reward him in Heaven," Lizz said.

"Do you think so?" Louise asked, looking across at Lizz and leaning on her bony elbows.

"Never doubt God's mercy," Lizz said. "I'll make the tea now. Will you have a cup of tea, Mother? And you, Louise?"

"I don't care if I do," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"No, it will keep me awake," Louise said.

"Why, Danny!" she exclaimed as Danny suddenly appeared in the kitchen.

Lizz and Mary O'Flaherty turned and saw Danny rubbing his sleepy eyes, standing in the entrance to the kitchen.

"Why, son, you near scared the wits out of me," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Oh, there's my darling, beautiful boy," Lizz exclaimed.

"Me little grandson," Mary O'Flaherty said with a fierce pride.

Danny gazed at his grandmother. Then he looked at his mother, bewildered.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"Come, son, I'll put you back to bed. You should be sleeping," Mary O'Flaherty said. She led him back to his bedroom while Lizz watched, troubled.

Her heart was torn because of the way the little boy, her own son, had looked at her and asked her why she was here. Why, he had looked at her and talked to her as if she were a stranger.

When they heard the click of the key in the front door, Lizz and Mary O'Flaherty looked knowingly at each other but didn't speak. Louise had gone back to bed. They remained silent, sitting at the table and exchanging understanding glances as they heard Margaret quietly shutting the door.

Then they heard a muffled sob.

"Something's happened," Lizz whispered, leaning across the table toward her mother.

Mary O'Flaherty nodded. A grin of satisfaction crossed her face.

"Maybe he tied a can to her," Lizz whispered.

As Mary O'Flaherty opened her mouth to speak, they heard Margaret call agitatedly:

"Who's that?"

"Is that you, Peg?" Mary O'Flaherty asked calmly.

Margaret came out to the kitchen.

"I heard whispering. I didn't expect to find you up so late."

"Hello, Peg," Lizz said sweetly, but with an undercurrent of irony.

"But what's happened to father? Is something wrong that you're here so late?" Margaret asked, agitated again.

"I didn't want my mother to be alone," Lizz said.

"It's Pa, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said solemnly. "Ah, his pains were terrible."

"Is he all right now?" Margaret asked.

"When I prayed, Peg, the pains stopped," Lizz said.

Peg cast a quick look of annoyance at Lizz.

"He's restin' now, thank God," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Another moan came from the front of the apartment. Then they all heard Old Tom calling:

"Mary! Mary!"

They hurried to his bedroom.

VI

Old Tom looked pleadingly at Margaret. She quickly turned her head so that her face would not betray her feelings. Old Tom kept looking, as though to ask with his eyes why this had happened to him and why he must suffer like this.

"I'll get him the hot water bag," Margaret said, struggling to control her voice.

"I'll get it, Peg," Lizz said.

"No, you and mother stay here with him. Say a prayer for him. I'll get it."

"The prayers frighten him," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Margaret had already turned and was moving out of the small bedroom. Stepping through the hallway, she wondered

why her mother had said that so that her poor father could hear.

She went to the kitchen and nervously filled a pot of water, which she put on the stove. She stood over the stove, staring at the water, impatient for it to boil.

This was why she had cried with Lorry. She hadn't known it then, but this was why. She had cried because of her father. She had cried because she had been in Lorry's arms at a time when her father was dying.

Oh, God forgive her. But God would, because she had not sinned. She loved Lorry, and after tonight she was sure that he loved her.

Love was no sin.

VII

"Does it hurt now, Pa?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

Old Tom looked up at her. He didn't speak. He looked up at his wife as though he were far away.

"Here, Mother, is a wet washcloth to wipe his face with," Lizz said, entering the bedroom.

Mary O'Flaherty took the damp facecloth from her daughter. She bent down and wiped Old Tom's thin, wasting face.

He shivered.

"This will do you good, Pa."

"Here's the hot water bag," Margaret said, coming into the bedroom and carrying the bag and a towel.

"Let Mother put it on him," Lizz said.

Margaret gave Lizz a sharp glance.

Old Tom stared appealingly at Margaret. Again she noticed the way he looked at her. She told herself that her father looked to her, not to her mother or her sister, for help and protection. She felt flushed with pride.

"Pa, can you put the hot water bag on yourself?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

Old Tom didn't answer. His hurt, watery eyes were fixed on Margaret.

"Can't you see he can't? He's in pain," Margaret snapped.

"Say . . ." Lizz began.

She stopped and looked at her father.

Margaret put the towel around the hot water bag.

"Here, Father, this is warm and soothing; this will be good for you."

Old Tom gazed at Margaret like a frightened child. She bent down and pulled down the covers. His nightgown was pushed up above his abdomen, which was pale and flabby and swollen a little.

Lizz quickly turned around and looked off at the wall.

Margaret tried to act casually. But she saw her father's pubic hair and genital organs, and she wanted to get out of the room. She quickly laid the bag on Old Tom's stomach.

"You hold it on your stomach, Father," she said.

His thin, frail hands clutched the towel.

Margaret pulled the covers over him.

"Does that feel better?" Margaret asked.

Old Tom stared at her, still like a frightened child.

They stood by the bedside. No one talked. Old Tom held onto the bag. He gazed at the ceiling as though he were seeing nothing.

The windowpane rattled as an Indiana Avenue streetcar rolled by.

"Mary, is it time for me to be getting up and going out with the horses?" he asked.

His question shook Margaret. She turned her head away again.

Lizz noticed the streaks of bluish light in the space between the drawn shade and the window sill.

"Ah, I have to be getting out with the horses and feeding the mouths of me children. Are you cookin' me breakfast, Mary?"

"You rest, Tom. Rest, me good man."

VIII

It was morning.

"Tom, are the pains gone?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"Pains? Sure and we'll be goin' to the Mullengar Fair, me and you, Mary."

She turned away. She knew it. She knew that poor Tom was dying. It was enough to tear your heart, the way he was suffering. And poor Tom, he was suffering so much that he was thinking that they were both young and in the old country and that they would be going to the Mullengar Fair. And didn't she want to be wishing the same?

—Ah, he's an old sick man, wastin' away, wastin' away, she told herself.

"They'll be playin' the bagpipes, Mary."

The poor man's voice was so weak. He hardly talked above a whisper.

"Sit beside me and talk to me, Mary," he said.

She sat down in the chair beside the bed. Margaret had brought it in and had sat with him, and then Louise had stayed with him for awhile.

—Poor Tom, he doesn't like to be left alone.

"Mary, tell me, is it warm out?"

"No, Tom. It's raw. Sure, the summer is gone now and the cold weather will soon be settling in on us."

"You don't say."

—So, Tom, you've come to this. Little I thought that you'd come to this, it's little I thought when I was but a girl.

"And, Ned, Mary, tell me son Al not to be bossin' him," Old Tom said.

"He'll be coming to see you," Mary said.

"What's that you're after sayin', Mary?"

"Ned will be coming to see you."

"Sure and he's a good boy. Is he doing well in Madison, Mary?"

"That he is. Peg was reading me Al's last letter," and Al wrote that—"

"And where is me son Al?"

"Cleveland, Cleveland, Ohio. He's coming home."

"Mary, tell me, is it warm out?"

"No, indeed it isn't."

"Ah, that's a pity. A pity it is."

She looked at him. He was gazing off. There were deep hollows under his weak, sad eyes. He looked wasted.

Suddenly he moaned.

"Ah, Mary, the pains in me stomach . . ."

—It breaks me old Irish heart, she thought.

IX

There was a warm pain about his heart, and there was a band of hot sharp pain across his abdomen. He moaned in a low, hurt, childlike way. He wanted to ask them to do something, to help him, to stop the pain. He saw them, his wife and his daughter Peg, and his daughter Louise, by the bedside, looking at him, and they talked, and Mary talked to him but he didn't hear what she was saying because of his pain. They stood by his bed looking like people he might be seeing in a dream. He blinked his eyes and ran a weak thin hand across his heavy gray whiskers.

He had a thought about them standing there looking at him. But before he could know what his thought about them was, the pains cut at his insides. It was like knives inside him, cutting his flesh, cutting his insides.

"Mother of God!" he moaned.

"Oh, I wish I could do something," Louise called out in an agonized voice.

His eyes turned to Mary, and through tears he saw her looking like the spit and image of his own mother.

"Mother of God!" he moaned feebly.

The three of them stood helplessly by his bedside and watched him writhe in pain.

X

"Peg, did you say you're callin' me son Al about Pa?"

"Yes. I can't help it that I didn't get him. He's not at his hotel in Cleveland. I called the Hollander Hotel; that's where he's staying."

"Sure, and I don't want him to be worryin', and him on the road, working so hard."

"He works no harder than I do."

Margaret got up and walked about the dining-room table. She sat down again and noticed Danny watching her intently.

The sight of Danny annoyed her.

"Why don't you go out and play?"

"I don't want to."

"Oh, get out of here," she screamed. "Get the hell out of here."

Danny turned pale.

"I have just as much right here as you have."

"You goddamned little brat!" she screamed.

He ran out of the dining room.

The phone rang. Margaret stood for a moment, trembling. She didn't want to answer it.

"Answer the phone. That's me son," Mary O'Flaherty called from the kitchen.

Margaret answered the telephone.

"Al," Margaret spoke into the telephone mouthpiece.

Her voice was almost breaking.

"Yes, Peg. . . is everything all right?"

"We're waiting for Dr. O'Donnell to come."

"What's happened?"

"Father. He's worse."

"What is it?"

"You know what it is. He goes almost out of his mind with pain. I can't do everything. I'm nearly out of my mind with worry."

She broke out into uncontrollable sobs.

"Ah, don't be worryin' that hard-working boy, and him out workin' so-hard," Mary O'Flaherty called.

"I can't . . . I can't . . ."

She broke off and sobbed again.

"Peg, pull yourself together and tell me what's the situation."

"You don't have to be here. You don't have to bear it. I do. I couldn't go to work today. I can't stand it. It's more than one poor human being can bear. And Danny—he's a little brat. I had to scream at him and chase him out of the house."

There was a pause. Al, at the other end of the telephone, was silent. The few seconds of silence seemed very long.

"Peg, brace up," Al began.

"It's easy for you to tell me that, but you aren't here. That's a fine thing to say to me now."

"But Peg—"

"You have to come home and help me out."

"Is it that . . . serious?"

"I can't do any more. Last night he was in such pain. He's dying. He's dying." Her voice rose almost to a scream. "I tell you my father is dying."

"I'll take the train home tonight, Peg," Al said.

"You have to."

"Ah, you should be ashamed of yourself, talking that way to me son, and you out to all hours of the night with that married man," Mary O'Flaherty said sharply.

"Mary?" Old Tom called.

"Father is calling me now. You'll have to take the first train home," Margaret said, now more in control of herself.

"I will, Peg. And please brace up. I'll take the train tonight, and I'll do everything I can to help you. Did you call Ned?"

"He doesn't care .

"I'll telephone him."

"Mary!" the old man called.

Mary O'Flaherty skirted out of the dining room.

"I'll be all right. Don't worry, Al, you can count on me," Margaret said in a voice that was almost calm now.

"That's the spirit, Peg. And blow us a kiss over the wires."

"I have to go to Father. I'm sorry, Al, if I worried you, but if you were here to see it and hear my poor father, you'd understand."

"I'm coming home, Peg."

"Good-by, Al."

"Good-by, Peg, and keep a stiff upper lip."

"I will. You can count on me. You can always count on me."

She hung up.

She stood by the phone for a moment, wringing her hands. Then she broke into sobs.

Chapter Twenty-four

AL HAD slept well and was rested. For that he thanked the Lord, because he didn't know what kind of crisis he would have to meet at home.

He looked out of the window of the moving Pullman car. The train had passed Gary, Indiana, and it would soon be at the Englewood station. Would his old father be living? Peg had phoned him this morning. She'd been very upset and said his father was dying. Had Peg exaggerated? A girl as nervous as she was sometimes exaggerated. But his old father was sick. There was no cure for cancer except a miracle, and if God didn't perform a miracle his old father would die. Death would even be merciful, considering the way the old man was suffering.

Would the old fellow die with his family around him?

Al tried to shake these thoughts out of his mind. He turned and looked out of the train window, seeing a big steel mill with the smoke pouring out of its tall, cylindrical chimneys, drifting, a dirty brownish-black, off into the gray dark sky. The day was sad. It looked like a raw, mean day. The train passed the big steel mill.

Al turned from the window. He admonished himself to be calm and patient and to submit himself to the will of God. He would do everything he could for his old father and he would try to keep his home on an even keel. If Peg wouldn't get too wrought up now, it would be easier. She loved the old fellow, and she must be suffering herself.

Suddenly he felt uneasy. What would he say to the old fellow? Would he see his father die? His father could die

knowing that he, his son, would provide for and take care of his mother and try to keep together the home that his father and mother had founded. The old gent could at least die in peace and with an easy mind. But would he see his father die?

Open fields, prairie fields and weeds and the day raw and the sky cold and no sign of cheer in it. Lake Michigan gray and somber.

This morning in the lobby of the Hollander Hotel he'd run into Charlie Tassman just after he'd talked with Peg on the telephone. That big, loud-mouthed fathhead. His loud laugh. Everybody and his brother in the lobby had heard Charlie laugh. The dumbbell, asking him why he didn't look cheerful and full of vim, vigor, and vitality. Christ, he would have liked to give Charlie a kick full of vim, vigor, and vitality right square in Charlie's big, fat back door.

He could remember himself as a kid, a little boy. They must have lived on Twelfth Street then. Mother had always wanted him neat, just as she always wanted Danny to be neat.

Peg had said that Danny was giving them trouble and wouldn't mind. He'd have to teach the little fellow a lesson. In times of crisis and tragedy children had to be obedient. They always had to be obedient.

He'd been an obedient boy. Hell, Peg never understood this and was raking things of their childhood days over the coals. Of course, he'd administered some discipline to her because she hadn't been very obedient, and the old fellow had never punished the girls much. Even as a boy he'd been required to take a hand in seeing that the home ran on some kind of an even keel.

He remembered himself walking along Twelfth Street in his Sunday suit. Mother had patched the trousers, but he'd been ashamed of his patches. His father had had to work that Sunday. The old fellow had worked hard in his day, and his hard work should stand now as good in God's eyes, if God were really calling him.

More weedy, vacant land. Some day someone, some smart

or lucky fellow, would make a fortune out of that land. Some day his ship was coming home. His father wouldn't be here to see that day. He prayed God and asked God that his mother live to see it. God spare his mother to him. And to his family. And Louise.

He turned from the window. Yes, he thought, some day his ship would come in, but it wasn't coming in today. Today, this morning, he was going home to sadness. He must hope for the best. In the end, no matter what happened, in the end all things were given by God and they were for the best. Faith could move mountains.

Al leaned forward a little. Again he remembered himself as a boy of eleven, wearing his patched Sunday suit and walking on Twelfth Street after Sunday mass, and thinking that he wanted to grow up and be somebody. And he had advanced himself. But he had never imagined that a day like this would come. Well, he had to face it. And if he did face it like a man and a Christian, God would reward him. God would one day move mountains for him, God would bring his ship home for him into a safe, snug, peaceful harbor where there would be harmony in his home and great success in life.

He sat back, impatient for the journey to end.

II

Whenever anything happened at home, there was always this excitement, always the danger of a fight.

Now Mother was talking on the telephone with Lizz, and she heard her brother Al calling almost angrily.

"Tell her to hang up, Mother. Tell her everything is under control and to hang up."

"Yes, Al is home, Lizz, and poor Pa is no better. Ah, the life isn't in him—"

"Nix, Mother . . . Peg, tell her to cut it out. She'll be feeding Mother pessimism," Al called.

Louise, sitting on her bed, sighed. All this talking and noise and excitement tired her.

"You don't say, Lizz?"

"Goddamn it, Mother," Al yelled.

"And what did she say, Lizz?"

"Jesus Christ!" Al barked explosively.

Louise sighed again. She was afraid and she was very sad.

Mother had hung up at last. She was glad, because Mother's talking to Lizz had caused more fighting.

She knew her father was dying. They all knew it except Danny. It was almost unbearable to see him.

She just liked it to be quiet at home. She remembered once upon a time when she was a little girl, but she couldn't remember how old she had been. Maybe she had been only four, or maybe it was five. And her father and mother had been sitting at the kitchen table. She could remember them sitting at the table and they had a can of beer between them. She could remember them, but she couldn't remember what her father looked like then. He had seemed big to her, and now she was taller than he was, and now his hair was gray and his mustache was gray, but it hadn't been gray then or at least as gray as now. She wished she could remember more clearly.

They were talking loudly and they were still excited, and she heard her mother hurrying by her bedroom and saying that she would get Pa the hot water bag.

The memory of her father was so mixed up. He was sitting at the table, with the stove behind him, talking with her mother, but he couldn't remember what they were talking about. She had wanted him to notice her but he hadn't, and Mother hadn't either. They were talking about something, not loud, and they were drinking beer, and then they started fighting. Her mother got up and started yelling about something, and her father talked loud too.

—The curse of God on you, Tom O'Flaherty.

She could hear her mother say that, shouting it.

—God would curse you, Mary Fox, if He had to live with you.

Her father said that to her mother.

She had been so afraid. She could remember that. She had been afraid that something was going to happen to her.

Maybe that was the way she had been all her life, afraid that something was going to happen to her.

Her mother had yelled at her father. And she, a little girl, hadn't known why her mother screamed and yelled, and why her mother fought, and why they talked so loud, and she hadn't known then that they were drunk.

And she thought that she could remember her mother pointing to her and saying something.

—This little one . . .

That was all she could remember. She was this little one. She was not the little one any more.

There was no excitement now. Peg and Al were talking in low voices in the dining room, and her mother must be in with her father.

And when they'd been fighting in the kitchen, she had had to go to the bathroom, and she didn't want to go outside to the bathroom in the yard. It always used to smell so. She'd done . . . done number two in her pants. And she thought that she huddled in the corner of the kitchen, and she remembered that Al came in. He was already wearing long pants, and she couldn't ever remember him not wearing long pants. He was so much older than she, he was almost old enough to be her father. He must have been working in a shoe store then, and he was dressed neat, just as he always was.

And she thought that it was quiet when Al came in, home from work. Because she seemed to remember the kitchen being quiet and Al sniffing and saying something about the smell.

And she remembered knowing he was going to hit her. It was funny, but she almost thought that she wanted to be hit.

She didn't know, that is, she didn't remember how Al knew it was her doing . . . doing number two in her pants that made the kitchen smell. But she did remember him hitting

her, hitting her so that it hurt. And her father had said something angry to Al, for him to stop, and his mother shouted to her father, and, oh, it was horrible, horrible.

—I'll teach you to be a lady.

She remembered Al saying that to her and hitting her, and she was sobbing. She must have been screaming.

And that was all she remembered, and that seemed so long ago, and here she was, grown up. They called her a young lady. And now her father was dying, yes, he was dying, dying, dying.

And Peg was walking by in the hall weeping.

She could only pray to God to help her, to help all of them. Please, God—help!

Louise knelt by her bedside:

—*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven . . .*

Chapter Twenty-five

I

SOMETHING was happening that he wasn't supposed to know about.

It was Father's sickness. Father moaned and cried. Men weren't supposed to cry, and even boys weren't, but Father was because he was so sick.

And it was raining out so that he couldn't go out and play.

Danny went to the dining-room window and gazed out at the rain falling on the back yard. They said to say *Rain, rain, go away, come again some other day, little little Danny wants to play.*

But he had said that when it was raining, and the rain didn't go away.

—Rain, rain, go away

The rain wasn't going away. It was coming down fast. It was like maybe God was pitching the rain out of the sky. Maybe God had a great big bucket of water so big that only He could hold it, and He was dumping it on the world. But it would have to be an awfully big bucket because the world was so big. How big was the world? They said the world was round and that it turned around and around. The world didn't look round. Was it raining all around the world, every place in the world? Gee, he wished he could be everywhere in the world at the same time. God could. God was making it rain. God made everything. God could do anything. Gee, he wished he could do everything. He wished he could make it stop raining.

—Rain, rain, go away.

He wanted lots of things to go away. He wanted Father's pain and Father's being sick to go away.

—Cancer.

He had heard them saying cancer when he wasn't supposed to hear it. Father had cancer. What was cancer? Was cancer pains in the stomach? He had pain in the stomach one day, and they said he had a tummyache. What was a tummyache and what was cancer?

They said cancer like it was something bad and he shouldn't know about it. They didn't say tummyache like that, and they even laughed and smiled when they said tummyache.

If it wasn't raining he could play in the yard. He'd like to go out and play in the rain, and he wouldn't care if he got dirty. He'd make a river in the yard, and drop matches in it, and the matches would be boats. There were boats on Lake Michigan and the Chicago River. He'd make a little river the way God made big rivers.

God made everything. He made rivers and him, and Mother and Father and Father's cancer and Aunt Louise.

The rain was raining fast and hard now. It looked silver. When it rained like this Mother said it was raining pitchforks. The rain didn't look like pitchforks; the rain looked silver. The drops were big. Sometimes Mother or one of them would say about rain like this that it was raining cats and dogs. The rain didn't look like cats and dogs either. It looked silver.

If he could go out and play and make a river by digging in the yard for the water to run through, he would name the first match boat he put in. He would call it Aunt Louise.

Everything in the yard was wet. It was getting soaked. He wouldn't care if he got soaked if they'd let him go out and play.

The rain didn't look silver any more. It wasn't as big. Now it came down like it was in lines. God wasn't pouring as much water on the world now. Maybe God was going to stop the rain so he could go out and play.

—Rain, rain, go away . . .

II

They weren't fooling him. Sure, he was a dying old man, and that he knew, and sure, he didn't care what would be happening to him if only the pains in his vitals would let up.

He held the hot water bag wrapped in a large bath towel over his stomach, and the ache or pain was dull and bearable. He was sleepy and weak.

His back was sore from lying on it.

He was lying still, and they were all out of the room.

Things were happening and going on, with them talking and fighting and running about, and it was all about him.

—Sure, they must be worried about me, he told himself.

But should he be caring now if they'd be worrying about him or not? They were grown, his children, and little they knew of him, their lawful father, little enough they knew. They weren't even born when he got off the boat at Ellis Island and had come to make his way in America because the little parcel of land in the old country was for his older brother, and his brother was dead now, and his father was dead and his old mother was dead, and here he was, far away, and he'd be dead and gone soon, far away from the old country and from their graves.

Himself getting off the boat at Ellis Island in New York harbor not knowing what was ahead. And hadn't he missed the old country then, and had a day of his life passed here in America that he hadn't missed the old country?

—Tom, do you think you'll ever go back?

—Pa, do you ever want to go back?

Sure and he wouldn't be letting on to them, but where was the man that didn't want to go back to where he came from and where his mother lived and was buried, in her six feet of earth? Six feet of earth. And he'd be having his six feet of American earth—not Irish earth. That he'd have, and that he'd be able to call his own. Six feet of American earth.

He sighed.

And he came to America to have his six feet of earth here. And hadn't he always thought that somehow he and Mary would go back to have their six feet in the dear old country? Even on that happy day when he and Mary bought their own plot of ground in Calvary Cemetery and knew that they and theirs would go to no Potter's Field, hadn't he still hoped that they would be going back, back to the dear old country?

The warmth of the hot water bag on his stomach was doing him a bit of good. Maybe he'd get better with the hot water bags giving him the warmth and with the prayers of his good friend Father Hunt, and he'd be up on his feet and about, and when his strength came back to him, sure, he'd go out and get himself a job. He could be a night watchman and sit watching someplace and smoking his pipeful of Tip Top Tobacco and drinking a can of beer and thinking his thoughts in the night. His son-in-law and friend Jim O'Neill might be able to get him something. Sure, they'd be against his going back to work, and his son Al would tell him he couldn't, but back he'd go, and his son-in-law and friend Jim O'Neill would help him to find something in the way of being a night watchman and would stand by him if the worse came to worst when they'd all be trying to tell him that he should stay in his retirement.

—Who's the father and who's the son?

That's what he'd say. And he'd turn to Jim O'Neill by his side and ask Jim, and he'd say to Jim:

—Am I right or am I wrong, Jim, me friend? Who's the father and who's the son? Am I the father in me own home or am I not?

—Sure and once I'm up and about, I'll put me foot down, he told himself with great and satisfying conviction.

Mary was in the room. He'd known it, and it was like he hadn't known it, and he looked up at her with surprise.

"Are you feeling all right, Tom?"

"Yes, Mary," he answered in a weak voice.

"Do you need your hot water bag made hot again?"

"No."

"I'm making you a bowl of chicken soup. It will give you nourishment."

"Sure and I'm not hungry."

He didn't want to eat. If they brought him food and he looked at it, it was as if he was afraid, and he'd think maybe it was the food that gave him pains.

"You be said by me, Tom. I know what's good for you and what's good for what's ailin' you."

"I think I'm gettin' better, Mary."

"You be said by me and take the hot soup when I bring it to you."

She left the room.

He didn't want to be having the soup.

Tears came to his eyes.

III

"Mother, can't I go out and play?"

"Son, it's too wet. You'll catch your death of cold in the rain."

"But it isn't raining so hard any more. Look out the window and see."

Al was in his shirtsleeves. He was wearing a white pleated shirt and sitting at the dining-room table.

"Goddamn it, didn't you hear it's raining out?" he snapped at Danny.

"But it's not raining hard."

Al jumped up and, going over to Danny, gave him a crack on the side of the cheek.

"Goddamn it, you were told. Now do what you're told."

"I didn't do anything to be hit for," Danny said, putting his hand to his cheek and starting to cry.

"Goddamn it, you were told. You can't go out."

Danny lowered his head. He shook with sobs. He was ashamed to cry this way, even if Uncle Al had hurt him . . . and it had hurt. His face still stung. It felt warm where Uncle Al had hit him.

"Did you hit hitn?" Margaret asked loudly, coming into the dining room.

"I needed to administer a little discipline," Al answered.

Uncle Al had no right to hit him for nothing. He only wanted to go out and play. He only wanted to make a river in the yard and float burned matches in it and make believe they were boats and not bother anybody.

"He has to learn to do what he's told. When he's told he can't go out in the rain, he should know better than to keep asking," Al said.

"Oh, Little Brother, Auntie Peg is so sorry," Margaret said sweetly.

She went over to Danny and put her arms around him. He didn't like her doing this. He wished she'd take her arms away and not hold his head against her. He couldn't stop crying, even though it didn't hurt him any more and the sting was gone where he'd been slapped.

"You didn't have to hit him."

"I only gave him a slap because he deserved it."

"You hit me—you beat me when I was a girl. I couldn't read because of my eyes and you beat me, Al O'Flaherty. Oh, Al O'Flaherty, you ruined my life."

Aunt Margaret took her arms away from Danny.

But now they were fighting, and he wished they wouldn't.

"What the hell did I ever do to you except try to make you a lady?" Al snapped.

"Al O'Flaherty, you brute! You cur!" Margaret screamed. "You—you make a lady out of me?"

"Al, give it to her! Tell her, Al! Give it to her good!" Mary O'Flaherty said.

"Listen, you!" Al snapped at Danny.

Danny knew that Uncle Al was talking to him. But he held his head lowered and didn't answer. He wasn't crying any more.

"Don't you hear me?"

Danny looked up, frightened.

"Get the hell out of the house and play. Go on."

"I don't want to go out and play now."

Danny didn't know what to say, what to do. He didn't know if he ought to go out or what he ought to do.

"Peg, Peg, go to your father. He's calling you," Mary O'Flaherty said urgently.

Margaret, already in tears, left the room.

"Did you hear me?" Al barked at Danny.

Danny sat sulking in a corner. He wished Uncle Al hadn't come home yesterday.

"Well, go ahead, go on," Uncle Al said angrily.

"What?" he asked slowly, trying to hide his fear.

He was afraid. He was so afraid.

He didn't move. He knew he ought to do what Uncle Al said and go out and play, and he wanted to, but he couldn't move. He hadn't done anything, nothing to be hit for. He hadn't done anything to be yelled at for and for Uncle Al to get so mad at him like this. It wasn't fair.

Al rushed over to him and grabbed him.

"Goddamn it, you're going out and play now, goddamn you!"

Danny was stunned with fear. He was going to be hurt. Uncle Al was going to hurt him. Uncle Al was going to hit him again.

Al shook him.

Danny burst into tears. His body trembled with sobs as Al shook him again.

"Go on, put your sweater on and get the hell out of the house, and, goddamn you, do it fast or I'll make you, you goddamned little . . ."

The agonized moans of Old Tom could be heard from the front.

Danny went to his room, flung himself on his bed, and sobbed convulsively. He was hurt inside of himself. He wanted to stop crying and he couldn't. A sob shook his little body. It seemed to come out of all that was himself, all that was

Danny O'Neill. He kicked his feet on the bed impulsively.

—I'm just a little boy, he told himself amid his choking sobs.

His sobs became quieter. He stopped sobbing but lay with his head buried in the comforter on his bed. He was all alone. He could hear them talking and fighting, and he could hear Father moaning, and it all wasn't fair. He shouldn't have been hit. Uncle Al shouldn't have hit him in the face.

He almost cried again. He was on the verge of sobbing, but he didn't cry. He didn't sob.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Uncle Al was talking to him. He was still mad. He was going to be hurt again. He was going to be hit again.

"Jesus Christ, what the hell kind of a baby are you?"

Danny didn't answer; he couldn't speak. It was like he didn't know where he was. It was like he was shivering inside of himself.

It was going to happen. Something was going to happen. He heard his uncle coming to the bed, coming the few feet between the open door and the bed. He heard his short breathing. It was coming.

He felt Uncle Al's hands on him. He could do nothing, say nothing.

Uncle Al grabbed him, pulled him over on his back with a rough, quick, angry movement.

"Didn't I tell you to go out?"

With eyes of fear he looked up at his uncle through his tears. He saw Uncle Al but it wasn't Uncle Al, it didn't look like Uncle Al. Uncle Al looked so big. His face looked so big.

"You'll go out and play now, rain or no rain. I'll teach you how to act like a gentleman."

Al grabbed Danny and pulled him off the bed.

Crying, Danny called out:

"Let me alone."

Father was moaning.

"Where's your sweater?"

Danny was too confused and frightened to answer.

Al held Danny firmly and glared at his nephew. He was in a rage of anger. The thought came to him that he shouldn't do this; it spoke to him like a voice of conscience. But without control he lifted his left hand, stuck his tongue out and licked his lips, and slapped Danny's face with a swift, sweeping stroke of his hand.

Danny let out a choked sob.

"When I speak to you, answer me," Al said commandingly. "Now, answer me!"

But no words would come out of him. He struggled with himself, afraid that Uncle Al would hurt him again. Struggling for breath, blinking his eyes, and through choked-up sobs, he said:

"Yes, sir."

He knew where his sweater was. He couldn't tell Uncle Al.

Uncle Al glanced around the room. He saw Danny's red sweater on a chair. He picked it up with a brisk gesture.

"Here, put this on."

He handed the sweater to Danny.

Danny held the crumpled-up sweater. He couldn't move. He couldn't put it on. He stood, sobs still choking him.

Then, as he started to put the sweater on, Al snatched it from him and said, still in anger:

"I'll put it on you."

Al swung Danny around.

"Put out your arms."

Danny obeyed automatically. Al shoved Danny's arms through the sweater.

"Now, go and play and don't ever act like this again."

Sobbing, Danny left the room. He walked to the kitchen without even knowing that he was stamping his feet.

Al made a movement to go after him and silently cursed to himself. He halted.

He heard the kitchen door close.

Then he heard his father moan in agony.

He put his hands to his head for a moment, and a look of pain crossed his face. Then he left Danny's bedroom and went to the front of the apartment.

IV

Al came out of Old Tom's bedroom. His mother had put the hot water bag back on his father's stomach. There was nothing to do but wait for Dr. O'Donnell to come. Dr. O'Donnell could do something to ease the pain.

This morning he'd had an important appointment in Cleveland with Mr. Morris. He'd been certain he'd see Morris this time, and it would be a new and important account. But instead of seeing Morris in Cleveland, here he was in Chicago.

He went to the window and stared through the curtains. It seemed to have stopped raining, but the street was still wet. The day looked damp.

Peg was in there talking to the old fellow. Her voice was soft. Maybe it would soothe him.

He turned from the window and shook his head sadly from side to side.

—The old fellow must be dying, he told himself.

His own silent thought numbed him.

He didn't want to believe it. Maybe it wouldn't happen. But it was happening. It was cancer, and medical science didn't know how to cure cancer. Cancer. . . .

It was distasteful even to hear the word, to say it to himself.

He could still hear Peg talking softly to his father. That was good; she was giving the old gentleman some comfort.

Al again went and looked out onto Indiana Avenue through the curtain. The sidewalks were beginning to dry now.

Danny was out playing. He was sorry he had hit the little boy. He looked on him as if the boy were his own son. You should use "were," not "was" in this context. He had learned to speak with the grammatical correctness of a college man; he was proud of himself.

A moment passed. A stout woman went by on the street. Had she known tragedy yet, the tragedy of death in her home?

He hadn't meant to hit the boy; he had lost his temper. His conduct had not been becoming, and Lord Chesterfield never would have done what he had just done to Danny.

He ached with regret.

He sat in a chair and held his head between his hands, stared at the floor, and wished, wished with all of his heart that he had not flown off the handle and hit his nephew.

He heard another agonized moan from his father's bedroom.

It wasn't raining now. He was glad to be outside. It wasn't very cold. But there was no place in the yard where he could dig to make water run like water in a river. He couldn't do that.

He stood by the steps and looked at the dark back fence and at the drying narrow sidewalk that led to the alley gate and the alley.

Inside the house, when they wouldn't let him go out, he'd so much wanted to come out and play, and now he was out and he didn't know what to do or what to play. He didn't want to play.

Uncle Al shouldn't have hit him and made him cry.

He gazed off at the wooden fence. It was black and slivery-looking and it was still a little bit wet. He felt like he was going to cry again. He didn't want to be a baby and cry. And he was going to cry. He sniffled. A tear formed in his eyes. A horse and wagon passed, the horse making cloppety noises because it wore horseshoes. Father used to drive a horse and wagon. He wished Father wasn't so sick.

Danny sniffled again.

But he hadn't cried just now. He hadn't, and he had been afraid he was going to. When they fought, it made him afraid

and made him want to cry. Why did grownups fight so much?

He knew how to count, and he could count all of the boards in the fence, but he guessed he wouldn't count them now. Sometime he'd count them, but not now.

He wished Bill had come up today. Bill was still mad at him because the Cubs had lost the World Series to the Philadelphia Athletics last week.

Danny walked off into the wet, dead grass.

They wouldn't like it if he got his shoes and feet wet. Sometimes he didn't know what they'd like that he did and said and what they wouldn't like.

Uncle Al shouldn't have hit him and got mad at him. He hadn't done anything to be hit for. It was almost like he was getting sick because he had been hit.

Grownups didn't hit each other the way they hit kids.

Danny kicked his right toe against the muddy earth. He looked off. He tugged his toe in the muddy ground. He looked off again and up at the sky. The clouds were big and dark. They looked like they were dirty. Clouds had all kinds of shapes. What kind of shapes did these clouds have? There was a big one. A big gray cloud.

He kicked the ground again.

Did grownups feel all alone the way he felt all alone now? It was like you had nobody. When he was in the room and Uncle Al was hitting him, it was like he had nobody and he was by himself.

He picked up a stone and threw it at the fence.

VI

Dr. O'Donnell was red-haired and slightly unkempt. He was in his early thirties, but he looked older.

Old Tom stared up at him with eyes of fear and hope.

"Well, how are you feeling this morning, Tom?"

Old Tom didn't answer instantly. The hope went out of his eyes. He stared up at the doctor, fearful.

"The pains, Doctor," Old Tom said. "The pains come near to killin' me, Doctor."

"They've been severe, Tom?"

"What's that you're after sayin', Doctor?"

"They've hurt you, these pains?"

"They're after near killin' me," Old Tom mumbled slowly.

Dr. O'Donnell nodded his head as if he understood something that was highly significant. He pulled a large gold watch from his vest pocket, looked at it, and held Old Tom's wrist, counting his pulse.

Old Tom watched him with childish, superstitious awe.

"And they're eatin' at me again, Doctor."

The doctor nodded his head. He put his watch back and glanced down at Old Tom sympathetically. He bent down and opened his bag at the side of the bed and drew out his stethoscope.

Frightened, trying to conceal his fear, and also trying not to cry out or moan because of his pain, Old Tom watched Dr. O'Donnell. He didn't want the doctor to know how sick he felt. He didn't want the doctor to know how afraid he was. He was afraid the doctor would learn something about his sickness that would be terrible to know, something that meant he might be dying. The doctor might tell him he was dying. He was ashamed to think that he was sick and in pain and weak and old and fearful. And fearful he was.

Dr. O'Donnell had pulled down the bedclothes.

"Now, pull up your nightgown, Tom," he said quietly. "I'll listen to your heart."

Old Tom obeyed. His movements were slow, the movements of a weak and tired old man.

Dr. O'Donnell put the stethoscope to Old Tom's chest and listened.

With fear still in his eyes, Old Tom watched the doctor.

Drawing the stethoscope away, Dr. O'Donnell smiled and said:

"You have a good old Irish heart, Tom, a stout old Irish heart."

A feeble smile crept across Old Tom's wasted face. He wanted to ask the doctor if he would get better, if he would be on his feet again, if he would live. But he was afraid and ashamed to ask. He wouldn't for the life of him ask the doctor, let the doctor know that such were the thoughts on his mind.

Dr. O'Donnell bent forward and gently probed Old Tom's abdomen. It was soft and flabby.

"Now, this isn't going to hurt you, Tom," Dr. O'Donnell said.

The pains were like flames and knives inside him.

"Where does it hurt you, Tom?"

"All over me insides, Doctor."

Dr. O'Donnell nodded. He stopped probing and said:

"I'll give you something to kill the pain a bit, Tom."

Old Tom looked gratefully, then suspiciously, up at Dr. O'Donnell.

Dr. O'Donnell dug into his bag.

VII

Danny bent down in a corner of the yard and dug a small hole in the wet muddy earth. If he couldn't have a river, he would make a little lake. He wished he could make a big lake and dig a big hole, but he knew that if he did there would be trouble. There might be trouble anyway when he went into the kitchen to carry water out to fill up the hole. Maybe nobody would be in the kitchen and he could just carry out the water in a pot. He'd do it carefully. If Mother was in the kitchen, he guessed she wouldn't tell him not to do it. Only maybe Uncle Al would. He never knew when Uncle Al would say he could do something or when he couldn't do it. That was the way Uncle Al was.

Uncle Al shouldn't have hit him.

He dug at the earth slowly. He had only made a beginning.

Maybe he could make a pretty big hole if he couldn't make big lake, and he'd float sticks and matches in it like boats. He dug away.

VIII

Old Tom drew away slightly when he saw the needle.

"This won't be anything, Tom, and it will help you."

Old Tom nodded his head. The doctor had been giving him these needles and they helped him for awhile, and then the pains came back again, and sure, he felt it was merciful, their taking his pains away, and he wanted to get this needle, fearful as he was of being stuck with it. But, sure and he had no faith in the needles because the pains came back.

Dr. O'Donnell swabbed a spot on Old Tom's buttocks. Old Tom closed his eyes and waited for the sharp jab.

He winced when he felt it and kept his eyes closed.

"That's all there is, Tom, and it'll help you. It'll give you a little rest, too."

"Thank you, Doctor," Old Tom said weakly.

He turned over on his back.

Dr. O'Donnell pulled the covers over him.

Old Tom groaned. Another pain tore away at him.

IX

The silence in the parlor was ominous.

Dr. O'Donnell looked solemn.

Margaret looked at him beseechingly. Al kept tapping his left foot.

"Your father isn't in immediate danger," Dr. O'Donnell said at last.

Al and Margaret were dazed for a moment. Al stopped tapping his foot.

"But, Doctor, he's dying, isn't he?" Margaret asked.

Al gave Margaret a quick, pained look.

"Not exactly . . . the end isn't coming. But there isn't much I can do except to ease his pains. When it's gone this

far, medicine has no cure." The doctor gazed up at the ceiling. "Only God can cure him. Prayer might do more for him than I or any doctor can."

"You say, Doctor, that he isn't in any immediate danger," Al began, wanting the doctor, and also his sister, to be impressed by his calmness. "Is there anything medical science can do to improve his condition?"

"Frankly, as I just said, I can only alleviate his pain, and I can't go on doing that for too long."

Al's face was grave.

"He suffers so, Doctor. It breaks my heart to see him suffer so," Margaret said.

Dr. O'Donnell nodded his head and looked at her with sympathy.

"I understand, Margaret. It's hard—"

"How long will it go on like this, Doctor?" she asked.

"I can't say. He could go soon, or this could go on for some time, some months."

A look of despair came on Margaret's face. Al's face was expressionless.

"It's hard for all of you to take care of him—" Dr. O'Donnell started to say.

"I don't mind it," Margaret cut in. "There's nothing, Doctor, nothing I wouldn't do for my father. Why, Doctor, I'm better than a nurse with him. Ask my brother Al. He can tell you, Doctor."

"Yes, Doctor, Margaret is like a real Florence Nightingale with . . . with my father."

"I'm sure of it. But what I want to say is this—I'm certain you are very good and capable when you are with him, but he can't get the kind of care and attention he needs here, and it would be best if he could be sent to the hospital, to Mercy Hospital. I can't come often enough to give him injections, and I can arrange for matters like that at the hospital."

"We can't let my father leave us now. We all love him so much, Doctor," Margaret said, almost in tears.

"I understand, Margaret. But I strongly advise it, even though I don't want to propose anything that would put too much of a financial burden on your shoulders."

"Oh, we'll do anything—I'll do anything to get the money we need to take care of my father, Doctor. Why, I'd beg, borrow, and steal, Doctor, to have him get the kind of care he needs," Margaret said.

Al was thinking that this would be an added burden on his shoulders. It would cut into all of his investment plans. But he could manage it, and now that the Doctor had mentioned it, he had begun to think that maybe the old fellow ought to go to a hospital.

"We'll do whatever you think is best, Doctor," Al said.

"It's best to remove him to Mercy Hospital," Dr. O'Donnell answered.

"That's what we'll do then, Doctor," Al said.

"He's resting easier now, poor man. Me daughter Louise is sitting with him," Mary O'Flaherty said quietly, as she came into the parlor.

She sat down in her rocker. She looked very tired.

"Mother, Dr. O'Donnell thinks that Pa should go to the hospital," Margaret said.

Mary O'Flaherty gazed at her daughter as though stunned. She said nothing.

—Sure and if he goes he'll never come back, she told herself.

Chapter Twenty-six

I

HE WAS almost glad for his pain, it was so little, and he felt like there was a happiness in his head. It was like he was dreaming, dreaming. When he was a lad he was a one for dreaming, dreaming of America and of Mary that he would marry. And, sure, he wasn't in the old country, he was in America, and who was that beside him?

He blinked his sleepy eyes.

He was sleepy. It was like sleep was coming into him, into his legs and his arms and his eyes and his head.

"And who are you?" he asked the one beside him, again blinking his heavy tired eyes.

"Father?" Louise responded, in hurt surprise.

She had not been noticing him; she had been sitting here with her mind far away, imagining that Doctor O'Donnell had examined her and told her that she was well and could work. She had been thinking of herself, imagining herself in a new blue serge suit and walking to an office in the Loop where she had a job as secretary to a rich, handsome man. .

"Father, I'm Louise."

"Louise?" he asked softly.

"Your daughter."

"Sure and that you are," he said. "You're me daughter, Louise."

Her father talking this way frightened her.

—Me daughter, Louise, Old Tom sleepily told himself.

Sure, he knew her, but wasn't he too tired to be thinking of her?

"And Ned?"

"He's in Madison, Father."

"When is me son Ned coming?"

"I don't know, Father."

She didn't know what to say to him.

A little while ago she had looked at him, and he hadn't looked like her father at all. Now he did. He looked so sweet. Her heart went out to him because he was so sweet and so sick and so weak. But the way he talked wasn't like himself. It was the hypodermic that had done this to him.

"You say Ned isn't here?"

"No, Father, he isn't."

There was a pause. He looked at her and he seemed not to be looking at her. His eyes were on her, and he was looking at her as if he wanted her to tell him something or as if he might be looking into her and through her.

His lips moved for a couple of seconds as though he were speaking, but he said nothing. Then he asked her:

"Then where is he? Where is Ned?"

"He's in Madison, Wisconsin, Father, with his wife Mildred."

"Mildred?"

His face became quizzical. He seemed to be searching for some thought or memory, or trying to understand something beyond his comprehension.

"Mildred? And who is she?"

"Why, she's Ned's wife."

"You don't say?"

He talked as if his mind were going. She shuddered as if some dread had seized her.

Then she thought:

—If he's going to be like this, it's better for him to die.

II

"What are you doing?" Al asked, coming into the kitchen and noticing Danny carrying a pan from the stove to the sink. He was dirty and muddy, and his clothes were wet.

"I'm getting water to make a lake in the yard."

Al flared with anger but caught himself in time. He didn't speak for a moment. Danny stood by the sink, waiting for what his uncle would say.

"You'd better not do it. You'll get all wet."

There was a look of disappointment on Danny's face. But he was glad, at least, that Uncle Al wasn't mad again.

"What do you mean, a lake?" Uncle Al asked.

"I dug a hole."

"Is it a big hole?"

"It's not too big."

"You'd better stay in and get dry clothes on. You're pretty wet, and the weather looks bad."

Al gave Danny a gentle pat on the shoulder.

"You're a good boy, Sport."

Al wanted to say more, but he didn't know how to say it. He was sorry he'd flown off the handle and hit the boy. He wished he hadn't. He felt almost as if he were Danny's father.

—And my own father is dying, he told himself.

He felt a wrench of agony, but he couldn't show it. In this tragic hour he had to carry them all along.

"Yes, Sport. We'll have to go out together next Sunday and have a good time. Would you like to do that, Sport?"

"Yes . . . yes, sir."

"Mother," Al called, hearing his mother outside the kitchen.

"Do you want something, son?" she asked, entering the kitchen. "I'm getting things ready for Pa."

"Can you or one of the girls fix Danny up in some dry clothes? He's all wet."

"Blessed Mother of God, son, what have you been doing?" Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed, noticing Danny.

"I was digging a lake in the back yard."

"Come, let me clean you up and get you dry clothes before you catch your death of cold."

She went to take him by the hand.

"Sport, you'd better take your shoes off so you don't get the rugs muddied," Al said.

Al left the kitchen. He wished he hadn't hit Danny. He'd have to discipline himself to control his temper better.

III

Sure and he felt comfortable. Tired he was and comfortable. There was a heaviness in his head, and there was a heaviness all over himself. And before his eyes he could see colors the like of which he had never seen on land or sea. And it was like dreaming. There was a heaviness in him and it was like dreaming and it wasn't dreaming because he wasn't asleep.

They were out there beyond his room, talking and moving about. He could hear them, lying here and feeling the comfort come upon him. And in his head he could see a green field with a stone fence, and it looked like the old country for certain, a green field with a small stone fence and a stone house. And it was so quiet. Hush, hush. It was so quiet. Hush. Quiet like there was not a sound to be heard, not a sound, and like there was not a blade of grass stirring nor nary a breath of wind. And he felt like he was there in the old country in this quiet with nothing astir and nary a whisper of a sound or a noise to be heard. Hush, hush.

And quick as a wink it was gone.

Was he a sick man? He could remember something, something about himself being a sick man. And sure now he felt nothing but sleepy, sleepy, sleepy, it was sleepy he was.

He twitched his closed eyes and saw more colors, and, ah, they were beautiful colors the like of which he had never seen before. Ah, they were pretty colors he was seeing . . . pretty colors. Pretty . . .

There was something he was after thinking about. What was it? Something he was thinking about. Something . . .

IV

Margaret thought that never in her whole life had she been so nervous as she was now. She was waiting for the ambulance to come and take her father away to the hospital. It might just as well be the undertaker. Her father was going to die. She had known this for a long time. She had been the first one here among the whole kaboodle of them to know it. Yes, she knew it, but she couldn't believe it.

And Louise. She could tell by the way Dr. O'Donnell had talked after he had looked at Louise that her poor, sick sister was fading. Anybody could tell it; she didn't have the strength she used to have. She didn't sing and act gay like a young girl any more. She used to, about two or three years ago, before she became sick. But Louise had never been strong. Even as a child Louise had been sickly.

—I was sickly, too, as a little girl, Margaret told herself.

But she had overcome it. And she had done it herself. They hadn't cared much about her when she was a sickly child. They hadn't, except for her father.

And very soon now the ambulance would come and take him away to die.

—Oh, why must it be my father? she asked herself.

She didn't want to see anybody die, but if someone had to go, why must it be her poor, dear, sweet father? He had never harmed a soul all of his life. He was so good. And to see him now, suffering as he was and being taken away to a hospital. Oh, the nurses and the nuns at Mercy Hospital couldn't give him the care that she could give him—she knew they couldn't. But he had to go. Oh, she felt as if she might even go out of her mind.

She went into the bedroom and found Louise sitting languidly on a chair by the bed. Louise said nothing. She was thinking of her father, wishing she could do something for him.

"Is he asleep, Peg?" Louise asked, her voice low and tired.

"Yes, but it won't be for long. It's no use, no use."

Louise looked plaintively at her sister.

"He's going to die, isn't he, Peg?"

"He's dying. And he was the sweetest and kindest man. It isn't fair. What did he ever get out of life?"

Margaret spoke sharply, with an energy in strong contrast to Louise's lassitude.

"I wish I could do something for him," Louise said.

"It's too late," Margaret said with bitterness.

She went nervously to the window that looked down on the passageway that led from the front to the rear of the building. She saw a small segment of the gray walls of the building next door. They seemed to be pressing in upon her. It was getting dark out.

What was Lorry doing in Washington at this very moment?

He was far away now, and she needed him so. If only she could see him, put her head on his shoulder, and cry, cry her eyes out, knowing that he understood her.

Lorry loved her. If she didn't know that in her heart, she didn't know what would happen to her, what she would do now. She might even go stark, raving mad.

She was sure Lorry loved her.

She turned away from the window.

"Well, I was always good to him. I was always good to my father," she said.

Louise watched her sister for a few moments. A strange, uneasy feeling came over her. She didn't know what it was. It was as if she didn't know where she was even though she did know where she was. It was like everything wasn't like what it was when she did know what it was.

—Peg is my sister, she told herself automatically, as though she were telling herself something she didn't know.

Margaret turned from the window, about to say something. Louise burst into a paroxysm of racking coughs. The coughing seemed to come up from her chest and lungs and to tear at her throat.

She leaned forward, coughing, and tears came to her eyes. She grabbed her handkerchief from a pocket of her dress and coughed phlegm into it.

Margaret went over to Louise and patted her back. She was stricken with helpless fear for a moment. Louise, she thought, no more than her father, should be here. Louise was coughing germs all over the house. Margaret wanted to get out of the room. She didn't want to go on living here and sacrificing her life. She would, though, even if it meant getting sick herself.

"Oh, you poor darling. Come lie down, and I'll fix you something hot to drink."

Louise's coughing subsided. She wiped the tears from her eyes and gazed up at Margaret meekly, apologetically. Peg would think she was another burden, like her father. She didn't want to be a burden.

"It's stopped now," she said.

With her thin hand she smoothed down her auburn hair. Margaret stood near her. Neither of them spoke.

"It must be the weather that makes me cough more," Louise said.

She wished it were spring instead of fall. She wanted it to be a sunny day in May, when she could go out walking all dressed up in a new dress in Washington Park.

Margaret wanted to cry. Poor Louise. Did she know? Was the poor girl saying this because she believed it, or because she wanted to put on a brave front? It was enough to make you cry and break down. Her father going to die of cancer at the hospital; her sister coughing her lungs out with consumption. To think that this was happening in her own home. What had she or any of them done for God to punish them this way?

Louise was watching Margaret. Why hadn't Peg said anything when she'd said it was the weather that made her cough? Was Peg silent because she didn't believe her? Maybe Peg was angry and thinking angry thoughts about her because she was another burden.

"I feel better now."

"Here, Louise, you lie down and rest."

"No, I'll sit here. I feel better. Maybe I won't cough again. I'll sit here."

Margaret sat on the bed.

With her father going to the hospital there would be another bedroom. Dare she take it, take her father's room?

She was afraid to move into it.

"When is Father going, Peg?" Louise asked.

"It ought to be soon now."

Margaret felt the sob coming. It seemed to come from way down deep inside of her, like a wave, pushing against her, pressing up from her heart and from all of her body and being. Then it came. It came like something heaving in all of her, all of her being, and then it came out as a choked moan, full of agony and pain.

She broke into tears.

Louise was startled. Peg—Peg was the strong one. Peg shouldn't cry.

"Peg," she said helplessly.

Sobbing, with her body bent away from Louise and her lowered head toward the wall, Margaret paid no attention to Louise. And as she cried she felt as though everything, every joy, everything that made life worthwhile and worth living had gone out of it. All was darkness inside of her and dark in all the world.

Louise went over to Margaret and put her hand on her sister's back. She patted Margaret's shoulder. She wanted to cry, too, but somehow she didn't. It hurt her to see Peg cry this way.

Margaret's sobs grew softer. She stopped crying, and looked with tearful, dull eyes at the wall.

Louise asked herself if Margaret loved her father better than she did. Was there something wrong with her because she didn't cry and act this way over her father? She didn't seem to feel much.

Margaret turned around, blew her nose, and wiped her eyes.

"I didn't mean to cry this way."

"I understand, Peg," Louise said, trying to comfort her sister.

"I didn't want to hurt you or make you feel sad, Louise darling. You know I think the world of you."

Louise didn't understand what Peg meant. But she said nothing. She didn't want to see her sister more troubled.

Wiping her eyes, Margaret got up from the bed.

"I have to go and help get him ready to leave. There's always something to do," she said.

v

Louise wanted to follow Margaret out of the bedroom to help, too. But she just felt so tired. If she did anything for five or ten minutes, she seemed to get tired. She seemed to have no strength in her, and she would grow sleepy. Three nights ago when she had washed the dishes after dinner, that was what had happened. She felt useless. She was tired now and felt as if she would fall asleep on her feet if she didn't lie down. But she didn't want to lie down and be asleep when they took her father away and not be able to say good-by to him.

"How's the fair princess?" Al asked, stopping at the bedroom door and looking in.

"I'm all right," she answered slowly.

Al's voice had sounded different, as if he were trying too hard to be cheerful.

He came into the room and sat down on the small chair by the window. Louise wished he hadn't come in; she didn't want him in her bedroom. She gazed off, not able to bring herself to look at him. Al wasn't looking at her either. He seemed absorbed, worried.

They sat like this, neither of them speaking or looking directly at each other.

"Your father's going to the hospital is best," Al finally said.

"Yes."

"We'll all have to pray for him."

"Yes."

—They'll have to pray for me.

"Your father is a sick man."

"I know, Al. I wish I could do something for him—anything."

"We've all done everything we could, and so has Doctor O'Donnell. Now it's in the hands of God."

Louise shook her head slowly in agreement.

Al was very religious. Peg wasn't. Was she? Until she had gotten to feeling this weakness and this being always tired, she had always gone to mass. She wished she could go to mass every Sunday, dressed up the way she used to. She would try to go to mass next Sunday.

"He was a good man, our father," Al said, speaking quietly, meditatively, as though to himself.

Her brother was speaking of her father as if he had already died.

"Well," Al continued in the same vein, "at least we did give him a little time of rest and peace after he worked so hard most of his life."

Louise didn't answer. She was still gazing off.

Al turned and noticed the expression on her face. He wrinkled his brow; Louise was sad and moody. What could he say to cheer her up? He was jumpy.

He wished this ordeal of sorrow were over with.

"We all have to cheer up, Princess Louise. There's sunshine ahead for us. There's always sunshine ahead."

"I'm not too sad," Louise said defensively.

She felt as though he had caught her doing something she shouldn't do.

Al got up and went over to her. He bent forward and extended his left cheek and said in a jolly tone of voice:

"Slip us a kiss."

Like an obedient child she gave him a kiss on the cheek.
"That's the ticket. That's the girl."
He squeezed her hand and left the room.

VI

Old Tom opened his drowsy eyes and rolled them around. He looked about the room and at the ceiling, scarcely moving his head. He wasn't sure where he was or what was what. It seemed as if he had been away somewhere.

Then he saw Mary by the bed, looking down at him. He twinged, afraid she would be saying something to him and nagging him for just having been away somewhere and he shouldn't have been there and doing whatever it was he was doing.

He opened his eyes wide and looked up at her. Wasn't it a strange look she had in her eyes? Wasn't it, indeed?

And he wanted to say something to her but he didn't say a word. He didn't know what it was he was wanting to tell her. Now, wasn't that a strange thing, himself wanting to tell Mary something and his not knowing what it was?

"How are you feeling now, Tom?" she asked.

"Mary, is it after sending me to the store for soap you were doin'?" he asked her, speaking slowly and in a feeble voice.

—Me poor man, Mary O'Flaherty thought, looking down at him.

"I've brought a basin of water, Tom, to wash your face," she told him.

"Did you tell me everything you wanted from the store, Mary?" he asked.

—Sure the poor man talks like he's lost his mind.

"Mary, and is me face dirty?" he asked, looking directly at her with questioning eyes.

"You'll feel better when I wash it for you."

"And when is the barber coming to shave me?" he asked.

None of them had thought of calling the barber to shave the poor man so that he would be going into the Mercy Hos-

pital lookin' respectable. The holy nuns would be thinking that she wasn't the kind of a woman who took good and proper care of her man when he was sick on his back. .

"After the barber gives me a shave, I'm thinkin' I'll be gettin' up and gettin' meself back on me two good feet, Mary."

She took the wet washcloth out of the basin, wrung it out, and, bending down, she gently wiped his face.

"There, doesn't that make you feel better, Tom?"

He couldn't talk because she was running the washrag over his mouth.

Then she wiped his hands and arms, and, taking a towel, patted and dried his face.

"There, that will make you feel better, Tom."

"After I get on me feet, I'll take the little boy out to the park. I'll take him to the duckpond. Oh, I tell you, Mary, that boy likes the ducks, and a pleasure it is, a pleasure to see him feedin' crackerjack to the ducks and going quack, quack, quack."

"He loves you, Tom. Sure, when he first came to us, he wasn't here a day that he wasn't calling you Pader."

"And what's the name o' that park, Mary? I'll take him to it with the rides . . . the rides that shoot up and down. But, sure, I can't be taking him on the rides that shoot up and down for fear that I'll be fallin' out of the car. You know the name of it. Sure, didn't me two daughters take him and Jim's oldest boy, what's his name, one night to that park when they were out with two fellows? Sure, the park is over there a ways."

Tom weakly raised a thin arm behind him and pointed. His arm fell limply back on the quilt.

"Ah, sure, I've heard the name spoken many's the time. It's somewhere near where they used to have the racetrack. Washington Park? That's not it. You'll fix us a lunch, and the two of us, we'll be off for the whole day, me and the little one, me little grandson, and you'll never need fear, Mary, that

harm will come to him with me to be watchin' him. I'll be taking him to that park next week, and we'll be off and gone the whole day."

—Me poor man will never walk again, she told herself.

"Mary, you don't know the name of that place, they call it over here in America—what is it they call it? They call it amusement park."

"Sans Scuci," Mary said, mispronouncing the name.

His eyes lit up.

"That's it. That's the name. Ah, it was on the tip of me tongue. What's that name you said?"

"Sans Souci, Pa," Mary said, again mispronouncing the name.

"That's where the little fellow and me will go, and never fear, Mary, I'll watch him and not let one hair on his head be harmed."

"Now, Tom, I'll get you a warm cup of tea."

"Sit here and talk with me, Mary."

She sat down by the side of the bed.

"Peg, Peg, get Pa a warm cup of tea," she called out commandingly.

"Hold me hand, Mary."

He feebly reached out his thin right hand. She held it.

—Sure, it's cold, and there's hardly any blood in it, she told herself.

"Mary, maybe you and I could be going together to this place with the little boy. Mary, what was that you said the name was?" he said, withdrawing his hand from hers.

"You get your strength back first, Tom . . ."

She stopped. She was going to tell him that he was being sent to the Mercy Hospital to get his strength back. No, she didn't have the heart to, to tell him that, with him talking this way.

"Sure and I'll have me strength back in no time, Mary. We'll leave early in the morning, you and meself and the boy,

just the three of us. And you'll fix a lunch for us to be takin', Mary."

He reached his hand toward her. She noticed again how thin it was, all bone. She held it. And, yes, it was so cold.

"We'll have a good time. Sure and, Mary, we're not too old to have a good time. When our own were young, we didn't have the time to be giving them what we can give to the little fellow. We'll give him a good time, too, Mary."

She remembered him talking to her in the old country before they had come out. She remembered him saying to her, by the side of a neighbor's stone fence along the road to her mother's, saying to her:

—Out there, Mary, in America.

It was just like yesterday, and she a girl with her eyes only on him, coming out to America to be his bride, and here he lay, the poor man, and, sure, wasn't his hair almost white, and didn't he look older every day, his hair almost white and still not a gray hair in her head? And that day in Ireland when she had sat beside him on the stone fence, he had put his arms around her and kissed her, and she made as if she was mad, and there was that look in his face, and then it was, under the tree when they sat down, it was then she knew that he was hers.

"What day next week will we be going, Mary?"

Going. Poor Tom, it was to their plot of ground in Calvary Cemetery that the poor man would be going.

"Mary, we're going?" he asked.

"Yes, Tom, as soon as you are on your feet and strong."

"We'll sit on a bench and eat our lunch and watch our little grandson playing and running."

Margaret entered the room with tea on a tray.

"Who's she?" Tom asked.

Margaret stopped suddenly, stunned.

"Here's Peg with your tea, Tom."

"Oh, and we'll take Peg with us. Beg, I was after tellin'

your mother here that I'll be up and on me feet now and regaining all of me löst strength."

"Of course you will, Pa "

"And you and Mary and meself and me little grandson, we'll go out for the whole day, we'll go to that place . . . what's the name, Mary?"

Mary O'Flaherty gave her daughter a knowing look.

"Here, Pa, let me give you your cup of tea while it's still warm.

"Yes, Pa, Peg will give you some tea, and it will warm you up and put strength in you."

Mary got up. Margaret set the tray on the bedside table.

"Here, Pa, let me sit you up."

"Give him his tea, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said.

As Margaret was bending down and lifting her father into a sitting position, Mary left the room. The tears were streaming down her face.

—I always knew I was stronger than poor Tom, she thought.

VII

—He's crying like a baby, Mary O'Flaherty told herself. Me mother must have felt like I do when me father died.

"Over me dead body . . ."

He mumbled. The rest of what he said was lost. He mumbled something more, but none of them in the bedroom understood what he said. Tears streamed down his face.

". . . over me dead body."

They heard that, but what he said after was lost in a mumble of sounds.

"Pa, we'll see you. We'll see you every day," Margaret said, speaking in a quick, persuasive voice.

"Yes, we're going to see that you get better," Al said, coming forward to stand near Margaret.

"In me sick old age, sending me away."

"Pa," Mary O'Flaherty said, "Pa, sure the doctor and Father Hunt know what's best for you."

"Send me to the poorhouse. Bury me like a pauper in Potter's Field. Sure, I'm like an old horse, too old to work."

He spoke brokenly through his tears. Then his hands went to his abdomen and he groaned.

"That me own flesh and blood would do this to me in the latter end of me days."

He groaned again.

The bell rang. No one moved for a moment. Al stiffened. Margaret's hands trembled.

"I'll answer the bell," Louise said from the hallway.

Al turned and went quickly out of the bedroom.

". . . me dead body," Old Tom again mumbled in his tears.

"Tom," Mary said, as though she were speaking to him for the last time in her life.

They heard the sound of the front door being opened.

VIII

Old Tom looked meekly up at Father Hunt beside his bed. He stared at the priest like a frightened child.

"Father, you did me good."

"Tom, they'll do you good at the hospital."

"You'll say a good word for me, Father?"

"I have, Tom."

"Thank you, Father. Thank you, Father . . . Father, this pain."

Old Tom groaned again. He stopped groaning. He looked with questioning eyes at the priest.

"Father, am I dying?"

"The doctors will know best how to make you better, Tom; you're a sick man. We're all fighting for you. I gave you Extreme Unction because no man knows the will of God. Tom, we're fighting for you. Tom, you are a brave man."

Old Tom cried again.

"You're God's son, Tom."

"It's the pains, Father . . .

He groaned again and mumbled incoherently.

IX

There was so much excitement that no one paid any attention to him. The big automobile they called an ambulance was outside in front of the house in the darkness, and people were looking at it and looking at the house. And the men in white were putting Father on what they called a stretcher, and Father was moaning, and something hurt Father. They were taking Father away to a hospital because he was so sick. He knew what they thought. They thought Father would die. If you died you went away. Father was going away. He didn't want Father to go away.

"Here, get out of the way," Uncle Al said curtly as he came out of Father's bedroom where everything was going on.

"Let Danny boy say good-by to Father," Aunt Margaret said, coming out of Father's bedroom after Uncle Al.

"Of course," Al said, confused.

The two men in white came out carrying Father on the stretcher. It was like a little bed that you could carry.

"Say good-by to Father, Danny boy."

Danny looked at Father. He wanted to run away. He couldn't speak. Father rolled his eyes and looked at him.

"Good-by, Pader," he said.

Father didn't speak. He made a sound, but you could hardly hear it.

Danny turned and ran to the back of the house. He heard them saying something as the men carried Father out on the stretcher.

He looked out the dining-room window. There was a big cloud. It was black outside, dirty black. That was the night.

Someone was crying. They took Father away to the hospital. They were taking him away to die.

SECTION FOUR

Chapter Twenty-seven

I

ARE you all right, Mother?" Margaret called from the kitchen. Mary O'Flaherty was sitting in her small bedroom with the door closed.

"Let me be," Mary called back, her voice breaking.

She sat in a rocking chair, holding her big black rosary beads in her hands, which lay limply in her lap. She didn't pray.

She was stunned. She rocked slowly. The rocking gave her comfort.

—Ah, poor Tom, me poor man, he's better off dead, she told herself.

Rocking, she felt the chair under her. She felt it moving her. Rocking in her chair was a comfort.

—Ah, what little comfort there is, and he's better off dead. I'd be better off dead meself.

Her man had cried like a baby. And there he would be, with strangers in that hospital room and not with his own.

There were tears in her eyes.

Rocking.

The way he had worked all those years here in America. Sure and how could her children know how hard their poor father had worked all those long hours in the cold and rain and snow when they were little ones? And couldn't she remember Tom of a night after a hard day's work talking to her about the old country?

—Mary, what time do you think it would be in the old country?

She could remember him sitting in the kitchen in Blue Island Avenue and asking her that question just as if it was

only yesterday, and she could remember it as well as if she heard Tom's very words this very moment.

Rocking away, she fingered her black beads.

II

They sat about the dinner table eating in silence.

Danny wanted to talk but he didn't know what to say, and he was afraid to say anything. When they were like they were now, he didn't know what to say.

He ate slowly and looked intently at his plate.

They were all eating as if they didn't want to eat. He knew why. They were sad about Father.

Uncle Al sighed.

"What's that you said, Al?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"Did I say anything?" Al asked in surprise.

"I thought you were speaking, Al," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"No, I didn't say anything."

"You're not very hungry tonight, are you, Little Brother?" Aunt Margaret asked him.

"Me? I don't know."

"I never saw it when he wasn't hungry," Al said.

"Yes, he has a fine appetite, and he eats enough so that he'll grow up and be strong," Aunt Margaret said, looking at Danny tenderly.

"I wonder how Pa is? Peg, could you telephone the hospital again and ask if he needs anything?"

"I don't think we should telephone too often, Mother. They said he was resting comfortably."

"I guess it's for the best. Everything is for the best," Mary O'Flaherty said. "How can we tell Lizz? She doesn't have a telephone."

"I hope she doesn't come up. We have trouble enough," Al said quickly.

"Lizz phones every night. She'll phone tonight, and we can tell her then," Margaret said.

"Louise, darling, won't you have some more meat?" Margaret asked.

"No, thank you, Peg. I'm not very hungry tonight."

Margaret looked down at the uneaten lamb chop on her own plate.

They were all silent again.

Danny looked about the table, chewing rapidly on a piece of meat.

"Sport, you'd better not eat so fast," Uncle Al said.

"Al, now don't pick on Danny on a night like this," Margaret said.

"I'm not picking on him. I'm instructing him," Al said defensively.

"What is cancer?" Danny suddenly asked. His voice sounded clear and loud in the stillness.

They all tightened up. None of them answered right away.

Danny became afraid again. He must have asked a question that he shouldn't have asked.

"You're too young to think of things like that," Uncle Al told him.

"Little Brother, it's something that makes you sick," Margaret said.

"Where did you hear tell of that, son?" Mary O'Flaherty asked her grandson.

"Doesn't Father . . . isn't that what made Father sick so he had to go to the hospital?" Danny asked.

"You mustn't say that to anyone outside of the house here, Little Brother," Aunt Margaret told him.

He wanted to ask her why, but he said nothing.

"It isn't something bad, is it?" Danny asked.

Al was restless again. He kept opening and closing his left hand.

"Little Brother, you didn't tell Father you knew he had cancer, did you?" Aunt Margaret asked anxiously.

"No," Danny said.

III

Al puffed meditatively on his cigar and Margaret smoked a cigarette, as they sat at the table over their teacups. Danny was playing by himself in the parlor.

"It'll be much better for him there," Margaret said. "We couldn't give him the care he needed here. And, Al, don't worry about the cost, because I'll be careful and save and help out. I've always helped out whenever there was an emergency."

"Don't worry about that, Peg. I'll manage it. You think of yourself."

"I'll go to see him tomorrow and every day," Louise said.

"Oh, you're not strong enough. I'll do it," Mary O'Flaherty told her daughter.

"It's not hard. The streetcar goes almost to the door of the hospital," Louise said.

"Father Hunt will have him prayed for at all of the masses said at church next Sunday," Al said.

"Ah, Pa was in trouble. You'd hardly know he was in the house," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"He was so good . . ."

Margaret stopped talking; she couldn't say any more.

IV

Al thought of how peaceful and quiet it was sitting here in the parlor with his mother and sisters. It was late, and after their difficult day they all ought to be going to bed and getting a rest. In sleep they could all forget today. But he didn't want to go to bed, and they were all staying up. It was a time of adversity. In times of adversity, a family drew together; that was when members of a family needed each other. And they needed him, the son and the brother, now. ^a

He was here when he was needed. He wished they would say something about this, but he believed they recognized it,

even Peg. Even Peg? She was a good girl, and her heart was broken now. Sorrow and tragedy were chastening. She, all of them, would be chastened.

"He was so good to us all when we were children," Margaret said.

"Yes," Al said, his attention still on his own thoughts.

"I'll never forget the times he took me for rides on the wagon." A sad smile of reminiscence came upon Margaret's face. "I loved those rides. I'd sit up on the wagon beside him, me, a kid in dirty clothes because we were so poor then."

"Ah, I always tried to keep you looking respectable," Mary O'Flaherty cut in.

Al became a little nervous. He didn't want any false notes played on the violin now.

"Of course you did. But you had your hands full, Mother, raising us, and you were both wonderful," Margaret said.

"I was sitting in me rocker back in me room and thinking of how your poor father would get up and be out with the men and the horses in all kinds of weather. He'd be out from dark to dark, and the poor man would come home so tired from hard work that he could hardly lift his head, and I wouldn't know how he had the strength left in him. Many a night he was so tired from the hard work he did that I swear the poor man would fall asleep over his food."

"I know how hard he worked," Margaret said. "But even so, he had the sweetest disposition of any man I ever knew. He never lost his temper."

"Oh, your father had his temper before he got old. It was a powerful temper, and I'd have felt sorry for any woman that was married to him but meself. I hope the poor man is resting easy now."

"He is, I'm certain," Al said.

"What was that they said, Peg, when you called the hospital on the telephone?"

"They told me he was resting easy."

"God be praised if he has no more sufferings. Sure, tonight

I went in his room, and I almost found meself talking to him as if he was there. Ah, the house isn't the same with the poor man not here. Every day of the life for all these years, there he has been. It's not the same with him gone. Yes, God be praised if the poor man goes through no more suffering."

"Maybe he shan't, Mother," Al said.

"Louise, do you remember the rides on the wagon we used to take with Pa when you were a little girl?", Margaret said. "He'd sit up there so proud when he was on his wagon with his whip in his hand, why, you'd have thought he was a king he was so proud."

"Your Pa and meself worked hard and saved to buy that horse. We'd count pennies every night. I kept the money in a jar under the bed. And when he got his first horse and wagon he was as happy as a child. He was happy as a child. It would have done your heart good to see him. And, sure, the next Sunday was a fine, warm day and I put on me Sunday best and we went driving just like a lady and a gentleman.

"Louise, it was before you and Ned were born. Al, you well remember, Peg, you were in me arms; I was nursing you. I nursed every one of you. And don't I well remember him saying to me, many's the time, when you were all little ones, your father would say to me—'Mary, when the children grow up, they'll be able to read and write.' And every one of you can read and write."

"I know Father is proud of all of us," Margaret said.

Al looked at his mother tenderly. She was a wonderful woman, he thought. And he remembered her when he was a boy, wearing her black silk Sunday dress, taking him to church, holding his hand, with his father on the other side of her. For the rest of her life, he must provide for her and make her happy.

"And he never gave an eye to another woman," Mary O'Flaherty said. "He was a good man, Pa was. But I saw to it that he was, because I was never one to be made light with, not me, and Pa knew it."

Louise smiled wanly. She wanted to be married and to live forever in love, all of her life, and she thought love was something different from the way her father and mother had lived. But her father and mother must have loved each other.

And was this the end of love, one going, dying, the way her father was dying? Must you, in the end, always be alone?

Chapter Twenty-eight

I

PA WAS prayed for," Mary O'Flaherty exclaimed excitedly as she came into the dining room.

She wore a small straw hat with flowers on it, a black coat, and a black silk dress with ruffles and a high neck. Her hair was done up simply but carefully.

Danny, sitting by the window in his pajamas and robe, turned and looked at his grandmother. She looked so different dressed up than she did at home here when she wore her gingham apron.

"What's that you said, Mother?" Al called from the bathroom.

"Father Hunt said from the altar that prayers were requested for a happy death or a speedy recovery of Thomas O'Flaherty. I heard Father Hunt say it to the people of the parish with me'own ears. 'Your prayers are requested that God may grant a speedy recovery or a happy death to Thomas O'Flaherty.'"

Danny listened and watched with an awed expression on his face. He would pray to God for that, for a speedy recovery or a happy death to Father. Mother was crying now. He had seen her starting to cry, her face becoming different. He wanted to tell her not to cry.

"Oh, Mother, don't cry," Margaret said, coming into the dining room.

"What's in me heart has to come out," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"I know how you must feel, Mother darling."

But as Margaret spoke she remembered all the times her

mother had nagged her father and fought and quarreled with him.

—I'm the one that has the right to shed tears, Margaret thought.

Danny sat by the window, watching and listening.

"The way the poor man is suffering. Didn't I see him with me own eyes yesterday, and didn't I hear him groaning and moaning again with the pains?"

"Let me give you a cup of tea, Mother."

Mary O'Flaherty pulled a small clean white handkerchief out of her big black pocketbook, which she had set down on the dining-room table. She dried her eyes.

"I have to take off me Sunday dress," she said, going out of the dining room into the kitchen to get to her own room.

II

Danny turned back to the window to gaze out. It was cold out, and you could hear the wind in the back yard and the alley and sometimes against the window. He could see the wind. It was cold outside, and he was glad that he was in the house. He didn't want to go out and play today.

At church, they prayed for Father. A speedy recovery or a happy death. A speedy recovery, he knew what that meant. It meant getting better fast. Why didn't they just pray to God for that, for Father to get better fast? Why did they pray for that or a happy death? They didn't want Father to die, did they? And they were crying. Mother cried, and Aunt Peg cried, and Aunt Louise cried, and Mama cried, too, talking on the telephone with Mother about Father and Father's going to die. If he couldn't get better fast, why, maybe, couldn't he get better slow? Because if they prayed and asked God to give Father a happy death, then maybe didn't they want him to die?

If he wanted to go out and play in the yard, would he play Indiahs or would he play something else? He guessed he was tired of playing streetcar and motorman. He might play fire-

man. It must be fun to be a fireman and drive the horses, sitting up on top of the red fire engine or the long hook-and-ladder and driving the horses as fast as they could go, with everything in sight having to get out of your way, and the noise of the fire engine going. It must be fun, and maybe he'd start playing fireman, and maybe when he grew up he might want to be a fireman.

Firemen died sometimes. He never wanted to die. It must be awfully sad to die, and when you died you saw God, and if you had been bad, God punished you. He would be afraid to have to see God and have God tell him he was going to be punished. Was Father afraid to see God? But Father wasn't bad, was he? Or was everybody bad, or was it only children who were bad?

Aunt Peg never went to mass on Sunday like the rest of them did. Was that bad and would God punish her for being bad when she died? She would have to die some day because they said everybody had to die some day.

He never wanted to die.

III

It was little enough for them to do to come and see him of a Sunday afternoon so he wouldn't be a sick old man, dying alone in a hospital with strangers to take care of him and not his own, a sick old man far away and thousands of miles and an ocean away from the land where he belonged. Ah, where were they and why didn't they come and see him?

Sure, they had put him here without asking him as much as a by-your-leave because they didn't want him dying on their hands. And so this was his reward, and this was the gratitude paid to a poor, sick, bedridden old father after all his years of hard work.

—Me cup is bitter, Old Tom told himself. I'm drinkin' the last bitter drops of me cup.

He stirred. The fat nun who was his nurse turned instantly. She was sitting at the side of his bed.

"Are you all right, Mr. O'Flaherty?"

He mumbled. Then she rose, looked at him, felt his forehead, and arranged the covers over him.

He gazed up at her with questioning eyes.

"You try and rest," she said firmly.

Little she knew of why he couldn't rest. She hadn't been sent here to die. She didn't have pains like fire and like hammers beating in her insides. Little enough she knew of his resting and not resting. Resting. What else was he doing but making his back and his backside sore with resting?

"Is it cold out?" he asked the nurse.

"It's not too cold. It was colder this morning, Mr. O'Flaherty."

What was it he had been thinking about?

He screwed up his face as he tried to remember what he'd just been thinking of. Sure, he was forgetting everything that came into his head. And what was there to remember at the bitter end of a man's life but six feet of earth?

"Sister?"

His voice was feeble.

The nun, who had sat down again, turned and leaned forward.

"How will they bury a man that's seven feet tall in six feet of earth?" he asked.

"What a question to ask me, Mr. O'Flaherty!"

Old Tom didn't hear her. He wasn't listening. He was asking himself wouldn't he be better off if he'd stayed in Ireland and never come out to America, and there he would be, hale and hearty today and maybe owning his own little plot of ground. He could see himself of a Sunday, sitting on his stone fence, smoking his pipe and looking at his own little plot of ground. Sure, he'd be like a gentleman.

"In the old country an old man is held in respect," he said.

"That's what my own father always told me," the nun said.

"He did?" Old Tom said.

"He came from Galway."

Again Old Tom wasn't listening. His eyes were focused on the drab ceiling.

"I'll be takin' me pigs to the market at Mullengar," he said.

The nun turned and watched him.

"Tell me, did you ever go to the Mullengar Fair?"

"I was born and raised here in America," the nun answered.

"You never saw the Mullengar Fair?"

"No, Mr. O'Flaherty."

"Sure, Mary and meself, we went to the Mullengar Fair . . ."

Old Tom's words broke off.

"Me daughters should be comin' home from church now," he said drowsily.

He yawned. He stirred again, and the nurse rose and pulled the covers up over him. He gazed at her as though he had never seen her before.

"And who are you?" he asked her.

"I'm Sister Marie."

"Sister, what did you say your name was?"

"Sister Marie."

"Me wife's sister is a nun. She's Sister . . . what is me wife's sister's name?"

"I don't know, Mr. O'Flaherty. Did you say she was a nun?"

"She bosses all of the nunt in Brooklyn, New York, in an orphan asylum. They were all born to boss in me wife's family."

He yawned again and gazed sleepily up at the ceiling.

"I need me bed pan," Old Tom said.

IV

Lizz sat in the kitchen with her mother.

"It was good of Jim to go see Pa last Sunday, Lizz. It did Pa's heart good."

"Mother, you know Jim thinks the world of my father . . . and of you. Why, Jim said that every chance he gets,

he'll go to see Father. Next Sunday, my Jim will take care of the children and I'll run over to see Pa."

"Sure, it will break your heart, Lizz, it will break your heart. Sure, he talks about one thing and another and the poor man is out of his mind with the pain, and with what they give him with the needle to stop the pain. It'll break your heart. . . . It's hard words to say, but I'll say it. Death would be merciful for poor Pa."

Mary O'Flaherty shook her head slowly and sadly.

"Mother, never lose hope."

"Sure, it's not hope he needs but for the pains to go away. Don't I see him every day? Never in me life have I seen the like of it. Never in me life have I seen a man suffer like poor Pa is suffering. And with me daughter home sick, and poor Al out workin' for us and paying those bills at the hospital, I ask meself, is this what me and Tom came out to America for? I never seen man nor beast suffering with cancer in the old country the way your poor father does down there in that room in Mercy Hospital. Never in me life, Lizz."

Lizz nodded her head in agreement, her face solemn.

"Mother, how can you stand it? It must be breaking your heart," Lizz said.

Mary O'Flaherty didn't answer. She sat looking at her daughter, her eyes firm. Under her mother's gaze, Lizz lowered her own eyes.

"Me heart can't break," Mary O'Flaherty said sternly.

Mary O'Flaherty twiddled her thumbs nervously in her apron. She was wondering what she would do when Tom died. Didn't she wake up every morning asking herself if her man was dead or alive? And didn't she have a heavy heart as she went about doing her housework until it was time for her to dress herself up and go to see Tom? And didn't she cry this morning after coming home from mass when Pa was prayed for? Now it was like the poor man was neither dead nor alive. He was as much as dead, and she saw him wasting away and thin as a rail and him looking so old . . .

"He looks older every day," she said.

Lizz nodded in agreement again.

She was thinking that if she had gone into the convent as she had wanted to before she'd met Jim, she might be a nun now nursing the sick and the ill. She might be in Mercy Hospital, and she might even be nursing her own father. And she could nurse him better and give him more comfort than the nuns could because she was his daughter. She was his favorite daughter. She knew she was, and she'd always known she was his favorite daughter.

"God will reward him in Heaven for all that he's suffered, Mother."

"And sure, Lizz, he's like a child, like a little child. This afternoon when I was leaving, he cried like a baby."

Seeing Tom in the hospital, she couldn't believe her own eyes. Her eyes told her that the man was dying, her man. And with her heart she couldn't believe it. Last night she lay in her bed, thinking of how, when Tom came out of the hospital, her son Al would be getting his father a new Sunday suit, and she had seen herself and Tom going to church on Sunday morning.

"I wrote to Sister again, Mother."

"Did me sister write?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, hunching herself forward and looking at her daughter with sudden alertness.

"No, she didn't."

"The last letter we got, Louise read it to me. My sister was always fond of Tom, and it breaks her poor heart, too. Sure, she's praying, and she has all of the holy nuns under her praying for your poor father."

"If prayers can save my poor father, he'll be saved," Lizz said; she was almost in tears.

Lizz thought that if she had become a Poor Clare, she could be spending all of her time praying, praying for her father, her mother, and her brothers and sisters.

"Tom asked me yesterday to have me sister remember him

in her prayers. But I tell you, Lizz, only Father Hunt can give him any comfort. Ah, Father Hunt is a walking saint of God, and his mother in Heaven must be the proud one, looking down and seeing her son, a walking saint of God."

"Yes, Mother," Lizz agreed.

She looked closely at her mother, and it seemed to her that she had never felt so close to her as she did now. She was full of sorrow and love for her mother and father. She was a mother herself now, and a wife. She knew in a way her sisters didn't know, couldn't know, she knew all that her mother was going through.

"Mother, remember the first time I brought my Jim to the house and he met Pa?"

"Did you do that?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, again moody and abstracted.

"You remember. We were living down at Twenty-fifth and Wabash then."

"And what did Pa say?"

"Oh, he liked Jim. He liked Jim right off the bat. And my Jim liked him. They took to each other the minute they set eyes on each other."

"How is me son-in-law Jim O'Neill?"

"Oh, Mother, some nights when he comes home, he's so tired he falls into bed as soon as supper is over. And he's so tired he gets cranky."

"It was the same with Pa. But I wasn't a one to let him be cranky. A man must be said by his wife."

"Mother, I'm your daughter."

"By God, you are."

v

It was night. All his life hadn't he been hearing it said, *black as night*. Ah, black as night for a sick old man in a hospital! Ah, Mother of God. Mother of God . . . Mother of God . . . Mother of God have mercy on him. Have mercy . . . black as night.

And sure he was lying in bed with Mary, and never again would he be lying with Mary in bed when it was black as night. And he would sometimes think God and the Mother of God would forgive him because it was no sin with a man's wife. And black as night in the bed with Mary and Mary telling him not to let the children hear him.

"What was that you were tellin' me, Mary?"

"Be still, Mr. O'Flaherty."

"And who are you?"

"I'm Sister Mañic."

"I'm not meanin' to be hurting you, Mary."

"Hush, hush."

And there were times when it was like the Devil that was in his pants, the Devil. That was where you could find the Devil, in a man's pants. And didn't the Devil come in the black of night?

"Mary . . ."

"Hush, hush."

A half-muttered, groaning sound came out of his throat.

And didn't Mary cry on the night they were married? He well remembered. Indeed, he well remembered Mary crying in the black of night and Mary telling him it was near the death of her.

Blessed Mother of God.

He mumbled in a low, weak voice.

It was so dark. Sure, it was night, but where in the name of God was he? He reached his hand over to his left, feeling. There was a sharp pain in his intestines. He was alone. He was frightened. Then he cried out.

He heard a swishing movement. Someone was near him, moving. There was a dark, black shadow over him.

"Mother!" he cried out.

Ah, and it was the ghost of his own mother, his own dear mother.

"Are you in pain, Mr. O'Flaherty?"

"And what brings you to me, Mother?"

He couldn't see her. He could feel her near him and hear her. Sure, he could hear her as if she was breathing. And glory be to God but it was a miracle, with her laying her hand on his forehead and her hand not feeling like the hand of a ghost at all.

He was soothed by the touch on his forehead. For a moment he felt no pain. Then it came again. Tearing and hammering and pulling at him and in him, and burning and stabbing and sticking in his insides and hurting his back and . . . oh, Mother of God.

"Oh!"

It was a wail and a cry. It was an expression of sheer agony. And it became a hurt, restless, incessant moan.

"Mother! Mother! Mother!" he cried out in the midst of his torment.

VI

"Sure, I can see that it's going to be a fine, sunny day," Old Tom said, but there was no one to hear.

He blinked his eyes and lay, half-sitting, propped up in the hospital bed.

On a fine sunny day like this, why couldn't he begin to get better?

—Doctor, tell me, is me condition improvin'?

He had asked that question of Dr. O'Donnell, but what was it the doctor had told him? He couldn't remember.

God's morning sunshine was a wonderful thing, a beautiful thing it was, and wouldn't he like to be walking in it and sitting on a bench in Washington Park in God's warm sunshine, smoking his pipe and passing the time of day with a neighbor? The morning when some of God's sunshine would come through the window was a fine thing, and it was the time of day when he was feeling his best. And of a night here in the hospital, hadn't he waited to see the light of day? Because when he saw the light of day, and when God's warm sunshine came out, he felt better. And he would get

to thinking that this was going to be the day when his condition would be improving.

—What's going on out there?

He asked himself this, inclining his head toward the door of his room as he heard soft, fast footsteps in the corridor. The footsteps and now and again the sight of a nurse or a nun passing or a doctor flying by, and the sound of their voices and this going on all day—things were always happening out there, and he wished they would let him get out of his bed to see what it was that was going on and causing all the excitement. Sure, it was the same, every morning, morning after morning. And at night, and still as the night, and it was enough to give a man sweats. With God's sunshine and the fine daylight so a man could be seeing and knowing what he was after seeing, and with all of them here to be taking care of a man, sure and didn't you get to feeling that a man couldn't be dying? But in the night a man could die.

And that one flying by in black, the fat one. Who might she be?

But when the door was open, you could hear some of them howling and moaning, and there was an old man, a Mr. Dempsey down the hall, and he would get to howling and moaning until it was a fright to be hearing the poor man. They wouldn't tell him about that old Mr. Dempsey, but they didn't fool him, because he knew that that old Mr. Dempsey, from the North Side, was a dying man.

In the night he'd get to thinking that he was a dying man himself, and in the morning he'd be thinking the way he was now, that the day had come when his condition would be improving.

—Dr. O'Donnell, when will me condition improve? Old Tom said to himself.

"How are you feeling this morning, Mr. O'Flaherty?"

"Well, well indeed, me condition is improvin', Doctor," Old Tom said, staring up hopefully at the young interne.

There was a bit of pain down, there now, but he wouldn't be speaking of it. Maybe it was nothing at all but the big pains going away with his condition improving.

"I'll be back, Mr. O'Flaherty!" the interne said, leaving the room.

Old Tom looked at the morning sunshine through the hospital window. Ah, if they'd only let him out in that sunshine, wouldn't he be improving faster?

Chapter Twenty-nine

I

H E'D wanted to tell Mary that he was afraid of America, afraid of it here in America, and, sure, if he told her that, what kind of a man would she be thinking him to be? Ah, she was a woman with nary a fear in her, not Mary. It was a source of wonderment to him that she had nary a fear in her heart, and the two of them; greenhorns if you like it, greenhorns in America in Brooklyn, New York, and Green Bay, Wisconsin; and Chicago. The strange people he'd seen and they were Americans and not his own people. Sure, wasn't he afraid to ask them how to find a street in Brooklyn? But not Mary, never her. Never 'in his life had he seen so many people as when he came out here to America, and that had been a cause for wonderment to him, where they had all come from. Hadn't he always been asking himself that question?

Lying here in his hospital bed, when the pains weren't on him, he would think of all this, and think of what he came out here for. Sure, wasn't it to make money and marry Mary? Devil a lot of money he made, and until the children grew up it had been all they could do to keep body and soul together and put food in their mouths. And how would the children know what was in him and the work he had done, the saving of money for his own horse and wagon and for the plot of burial ground in Calvary Cemetery?

Didn't he know he wasn't a scholar and couldn't read and write, but when he came home of a night, he'd be too tired to be learning. And where was a man without reading and writing, but they were, all learning it here in America.

He sighed. The fat nun was sitting there, waiting to take care of his wants, and, sure, did he ever dream that the day would come when a fat nun would be sitting beside his bed waiting for him to be wanting something for her to jump and be giving it, to him, did he ever think that such a day would come in his poor old life?

Mary had always been too busy to be doing that, and when their son Al came, sure, Al had been the apple of her eye, and it was Al this and Al that and Al the other thing and the Devil take the hindmost, and it was himself that was the hindmost.

And the nun was always telling them that he didn't say much. What was there for him to be saying when he was lying here on his bed of pain, thinking the thoughts that he couldn't be telling to a soul on earth, except maybe to his friend, Father Hunt? When all of them got to talking at home, sure, how could he ever have had his say?

Blessed Mother of God, why had he ever come out to America to work hard all of his life and find himself here in a hospital, Mercy Hospital, lying on his bed of pain? Ah, blessed Mother of God!

He furrowed his brows as he heard footsteps in the hall. Sure, when he first came to America, he would look at the people in New York and Brooklyn, New York with wonder in his eyes because they were Americans and he was in America. And not a soul, not a soul on this earth knew how he was always wanting to go back and wishing he had never come out, and himself driving the horse and wagon and not knowing the names of the streets and wanting to ask this man and that for directions and not always asking because of his brogue and his not wanting it thought he was a greenhorn, and getting lost and not knowing where he was and wanting to go home to Ireland.

And who was it going by in the hall outside his room?

If they'd only let him go out and see and walk about a bit

and make friends and pass the time of day, but here he was on the flat of his back, with only nuns to talk to most of the day or the nurses who would come in to see him and ask him how was he getting along. And how was he getting along, dying on the flat of his back?

Ah, the pains were coming again, but he mustn't let on about it.

"Me daughter Louise has a cold," he said, without looking at the nun beside his bed.

"I'm sorry to hear that. She'll get over it soon, I'm sure. This is the time when many people get colds."

"She'd be coming to see me but for her cold."

"I'm certain she would. But Mrs. O'Flaherty will be coming again this afternoon."

"Do you think so?"

"She comes almost every day."

"She has me grandson to be looking after."

"Yes, she's told me all about your grandson. He's the apple of her eye."

"You don't think me daughter Louise will be coming to see me today?"

"If she has a cold, it would be best she didn't."

"What's goin' on out there?"

"Where, Mr. O'Flaherty?"

"Out there in the hall."

The fat nun turned and looked at the door.

"Why, nothing in particular."

"I do hear all of this coming and going and sure it sounds like there was commotion and excitement out there."

"I'll close the door so you're not disturbed," the nun said, starting to rise.

"Ah, 'tis no bqr'er atall, 'tis only me curiosity."

The fat nun smiled.

Old Tom grimaced. The pains were coming. God have mercy on his soul and spare him these pains.

Wearing her Sunday clothes and carrying a bouquet of flowers, Mary O'Flaherty entered the room.

"Hello, Pa."

He smiled in joy. He was so glad to see his Mary.

She bent down, and kissed his forehead. He stared at her in gratitude.

Chapter Thirty

I

MAYBE God was busy the way Uncle Al was sometimes busy, or the way Aunty Peg said she was busy working at the hotel. Sometimes he would ask her a question and she would say to him:

—Don't bother me. I'm too busy.

Maybe God was too busy. God must be very busy because He did everything and knew everything. He must be busy, all right, because He hadn't answered the prayers Father Hunt said in church for a speedy recovery of Father. And it must have been a long time ago on a Sunday that Father Hunt said them. Mother had come home and talked about the prayers and Father didn't die, and he heard Mother and Aunty Peg talking last night and they were saying Father was no better and he heard Mother saying to Aunty Peg:

—Ah, Peg, the end is in sight for your poor father.

So God must be too busy to answer those prayers.

Danny wandered about the house restlessly. It was raining outside, and he couldn't go out. It rained yesterday, pitchforks and cats and dogs, and he couldn't go out yesterday, either.

And Aunt Louise was lying down. She said she felt weak. He hoped she'd get better and they wouldn't have to have prayers said for her having a speedy recovery or a happy death, because he didn't want anything to happen to her even if he didn't love her as much as he used to love her, because he loved her still. And if God was too busy to answer the prayers for Father, maybe God was going to be too busy to answer prayers for her.

He wished Bill would come up and play with him. Bill didn't come up much any more. Aunt Peg said he shouldn't because there was sickness in the house.

He saw Aunt Louise lying in bed. He stood in the hallway looking at her, waiting for her to see him. He wanted to go in and talk to her. She didn't see him.

He took a marble out of his pocket and dropped it on the floor. Maybe she'd hear it and look at him and say something. He wanted her to. He waited a moment. She didn't say a word. Maybe she was asleep. But she couldn't be, because she had just put her hand on her face.

She didn't care. She wasn't interested in him any more, and she didn't love him any more.

He dropped a second marble. It made a noise and rolled off.

"What's the matter?" Aunt Louise asked in a tired voice.

"I couldn't help it. I dropped my marbles," Danny said.

He got down on his hands and knees to look for the marbles. He saw them in the darkness, on the floor between the wall and rug. But he didn't pick them up.

"Don't make so much noise, Danny."

"I couldn't help it. I dropped my marbles. It was an accident."

He crawled around the floor, pretending to look for the marbles. Aunt Louise wouldn't know that he could find the marbles. She didn't know that he saw the marbles. For all she knew, he was looking for them and couldn't find them. He crawled noisily about in the darkened hallway outside Louise's bedroom.

Suddenly he stood up and said clearly:

"Hello!"

He was looking at her as though he were studying her.

"How are you feeling, Aunt Louise?" he asked her.

"I'm feeling all right. I'm just a little tired."

She talked like she wanted to go to sleep.

"Do you want something?"

"No, no thank you. It was sweet of you to come and ask me, though."

"Do you want me to get you a glass of water?"

"No, no thank you, Danny," she answered, smiling wanly.

Danny stood there, still gazing at her as though he were studying her. She became uneasy under his close gaze. His blue eyes looked big. He looked like he did that day when he first came. And his face was dirty, too. Why was he looking at her this way? Could he tell that she was sick and afraid?

"Do you want me to go to the ice box, Aunt Louise, and get you a glass of milk?"

"No, no thank you, Danny."

"I will if you want me to."

"No, I don't feel like drinking any milk now."

He looked down at the floor. He stood looking at his feet and shaking his right foot for some moments.

"It's raining out. It's raining pitchforks again."

"You don't like that. You'd like to go out and play, wouldn't you, Danny?"

"I don't know," he said, raising his eyes and staring at her as though she might be a stranger. "Aunt Louise, when are you going to take me out again?"

"When I get better," she answered him, and she was almost crying.

"When's that?"

She bit her lip to keep from crying.

"Soon, I hope."

"Aunt Louise?"

"Yes?"

"Does God answer everybody's prayers?"

"I think so. Yes, He does."

She prayed sometimes. Would God answer her prayers?

"How soon does He answer everybody's prayers?"

She didn't know what to say.

"Right away?"

"What?"

"If I pray to God for something will He answer my prayers right away?"

"Maybe. I guess it depends."

"But He will, won't He?"

"Will what? What do you mean?"

She wished he would stop asking questions and would go away and let her be. And there he was with those blue eyes staring at her as though they were magnets to pull some secret right out of her. She was sick. She was tired. She didn't know what was going to happen to her. She couldn't keep her mind on what he asked her. And the questions a child could ask! Who could answer them? She must have been the same when she was little, but she couldn't remember.

"I don't know," she said to Danny, forgetting what his question had been.

"What don't you know?"

"Oh, please let me alone. I'm tired. I don't feel well. I can't talk much," she said, failing to keep her feeling of annoyance out of her voice.

He ran out of the room into the parlor.

—Aunt Louise doesn't love me, he told himself.

II

"I don't know if he's sick or what, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said in the kitchen.

Danny's lips were pressed together. He was mad. He was mad at them. He wasn't sick. He was mad at them for thinking he was sick.

"He looks all right, Mother!"

"I never seen him behaving so queer. Peg, I tell you he's behaving peculiar. This afternoon I hied out to the store and left him with Louise. When I came back I called to him when I came in by the front door and he wouldn't answer and I found him in the dining room, quiet as a mouse."

"Little Brother," Aunt Peg called.

Danny slipped guiltily out of the dining room. Hurrying

on tiptoe past the opened door of Aunt Louise's room, he didn't look in. Aunt Peg was calling him, but he was mad and wouldn't answer.

"Little Brother! Where are you, Little Brother? Are you hiding?"

She came into the parlor. He didn't turn around to look.

"Come here and let your Aunty Peg talk to you."

He didn't turn around. He wanted to answer her, but the words wouldn't come. He felt her touching his shoulder, but he wished she wouldn't. He wished she'd let him alone. He wished they'd all let him alone.

Margaret came around in front of Danny and bent down to look at him.

Mary O'Flaherty came into the room.

"Do you think he's all right, Peg?" she asked anxiously.

"Tell me, Little Brother, is there something the matter? Do you have any pains anywhere?"

"I'm all right," Danny said sulkily.

"Look at his tongue, Peg."

"Little Brother, put out your tongue."

Not wanting to do what he was told, Danny obeyed. Mary O'Flaherty bent over her daughter's shoulder as Peg knelt, and they both gazed at Danny's outthrust tongue.

"It looks all right, Mother." Peg put her right hand to his forehead. "And he's cool."

"Son, is anything the matter with you?"

"No."

"You have no pains in the tummy or in your throat?" Aunt Margaret asked.

"No, I'm all right. I want to play."

"You go out and play and have a good time."

"I don't want to go out."

"Do you want me to read to you or play with you?"

"No."

"Are you mad at me?"

"No."

"Are you mad?"

"No."

"Did you do something naughty? You can tell me and Mother. We won't punish you."

"I didn't do anything."

"Do you want anything, son?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"No."

Margaret rose and turned to her mother:

"I think he's all right. He's just out of sorts, Mother."

Danny turned and went to the center parlor window and looked out.

"Be careful of the clean curtains, son."

He didn't answer. It was beginning to rain. A man started to run. A fat woman walked by fast.

He wished it was different between him and Aunt Louise.

III

It was snowing out. He wasn't mad at them like he was the other day when they thought he was sick and Aunt Peg had asked him a lot of questions. He was watching the snow because he had been playing in the snow and had gotten soopping wet twice and all his shoes were wet and he couldn't go out any more to play until his shoes were dry. He wanted to go out again because he had been building a snow fort.

It had been such fun building a snow fort. He wanted to build a big one, a big, big snow fort. He'd like to build the biggest snow fort he could build.

And look at it snow. So much snow. This was good. Santa Claus was coming soon, and Santa Claus came on a sled, and a sled needed snow. Look at all the snow. It came down so fast. The snow didn't make any noise. The rain sometimes made noise when it came down. He liked snow better than rain. He wished that it could snow and snow, and snow. Look at that man. His clothes were catching so much snow. Gee, he almost took a spill. And that horse was going slow. Father used to drive a horse. He wished Father was here instead of

in the hospital, because he'd like it for Father to tell him what it was like to drive a horse and wagon in the snow. And look at that snow. There was more than he ever saw before. There must be more snow than there ever was in the world before. The world was before he was born. That was funny. How could the world be before he was born? That poor horse looked tired. He hoped the poor horse wouldn't fall and break its leg. Mother said that if a horse broke its leg it got shot.

And look at the snow on the streetcar. There was lots of snow on the roof, on top of the streetcar. The lights of the streetcar looked like they were running across the snow, and they colored the snow so the snow wasn't white. The car had to go slow. The motorman was ringing the streetcar bell with his foot.

Danny began tapping his foot on the floor.

Just think, if it snowed and snowed and snowed and there was always snow and he could build big, big snow forts and snowmen.

There was Aunty Peg coming in the snow.

IV

She felt wet all over and her eyes were smarting in the blinding snow. It got on her glasses, so she'd taken them off, and she couldn't look at the snow. She was afraid that she might slip and break her leg. If she did, then where would they be? What would they do without her?

She had only a few more feet to go. She wanted to hurry but she couldn't. She had to watch her step.

—Always watch your step.

Once her brother Al had said that to her and it had made her furious. She couldn't remember when it was.

Had she ever had a day like today? Her nerves. Her splitting headache at work. They'd given him so many hypodermics they couldn't keep it up, and they couldn't stop the pains. How pitiful it was. He was dying now. He might as well be dead. She'd thought he would die right before her

eyes. And him calling for Ned. He had hardly recognized her. But Ned! Ned!

A few more steps.

If she fell on the steps of her own home and broke her neck or cracked her skull, what would they do? Martha Morton would probably say that she was drunk. Oh, in her hour of need Martha Morton was of no help. Martha was no friend. Only Lorry would be a help if she could see him. Some day she would be with him, all of the time. He loved her. He had sent her fifty dollars, and they sure needed it. How she needed him now. And he was far away from her in Duluth.

With tears in her eyes because of the snow and her thoughts, Margaret slowly and carefully watched as she walked up the snow-packed, slippery steps of the two-story yellow-brick apartment building on Indiana Avenue. She wished she weren't returning to this home and this family of sorrows.

v

"Hello, Peg," Louise said listlessly.

She sat wrapped in blankets by the radiator in the dining room.

"Hello. I got sopping wet," Margaret answered.

"That you, Peg?" Mary O'Flaherty called from the kitchen.

"Do you want a cup of tea?"

"Yes, I need one. I need something."

"How is Pa?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"He's worse," she said flatly.

Mary O'Flaherty came into the dining room. She blessed herself.

"Glory be to God," she exclaimed gravely.

Louise looked off.

Margaret, hurt and bitter, noticed Louise in profile. How thin she was.

Mary O'Flaherty stood in the room for a moment, and then, as she went back into the kitchen, she said:

"I'll fix you your tea, Peg."

Margaret sat down at the table. Louise looked out of the window at the falling snow.

"It's nasty out. I was afraid I'd slip and fall."

Margaret cupped her chin in her hands. How long could it go on like this? How long could she stand it? Every day, coming home from work, knowing that she was coming back to a house of sickness. Never being able to forget for long that she must always come back to this, to this sickness. After her father went, there was still Louise. Louise was going. How long would Louise live?

"There's a nice warm cup of tea, Peg."

Mary O'Flaherty returned to the kitchen and came back with sugar and a pitcher of milk.

She sat down by the table.

"Ah, the poor men out workin' in this weather," Mary exclaimed.

Did her mother think that way of her father in the days when he was out working in weather like this? Did he come home to a cheerful house or to one where there was fighting?

—I can remember him coming home and finding you fighting drunk.

"Lizz's poor man is out in this weather," Mary O'Flaherty went on, staring through the window at the falling snow.

Margaret took a sip of tea.

"What did Pa say?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

Margaret didn't want to talk.

"He was delirious."

"He was what did you say, Peg?"

"He was delirious. What he said didn't make sense. He kept asking for Ned."

"Me son Ned is coming. But can the trains be runnin' in this storm?"

"I don't know."

"I wonder if me son Al is out in this storm."

"Al is safe. You don't have to worry about him, Mother."

"Indeed, he better be or where would we all be without

him? God protects him. God will always protect a son as good as me son Al."

Louise coughed. Her cough was sharp, racking, dry. She looked apologetically at Margaret and then turned and watched the snow.

The snow was beautiful. Just watching it, you felt quiet. You forgot where you were. You forgot yourself. It was like dreaming or being asleep, watching the snow when it was so beautiful. She used to love the snow when she was a little girl. Once it had been snowing, and Al had been coming home and he found her playing in the snow with some boys, tumbling in it, and he had made her come home and he'd told her that that was no way for a girl to be playing. The disappointment she'd felt then seemed to come back to her now. She'd stood by the window and looked out at the snow and she'd so much wanted to go out and play in it. Now she had the wish to run out and just roll in the snow. It was foolish. But the falling snow was so beautiful to watch, so many flakes falling and flying through the air, just coming down, falling and flying through the air.

Margaret looked moodily at the dregs of her tea cup. She felt miserable. Just miserable.

"Peg, do you think you might call up the hospital and ask if Pa is any better?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

Chapter Thirty-one

I

IT WAS rotten. Rats, I thought the train would never get here," Ned O'Flaherty said.

He was youthful and very good-looking. His face was soft, roundish, and weak, and his brown hair was parted on the left side. He wore a lavender silk shirt, with a stiff white collar and a purple knit tie. He had pearl cuff buttons and a pearl stickpin.

"Father was asking for you," Margaret said.

"I'll go see him after supper. How is he, Peg?"

"He's the same."

Danny watched Uncle Ned. He liked Uncle Ned. When Uncle Ned had come, he'd talked to him in a way that was friendly. He liked the way Uncle Ned had said hello to him, and Uncle Ned had given him a dime. He was going to buy candy with his dime.

"Maybe you better go see Pa in the morning, Ned," Mary O'Flaherty said.

"I can go tonight. It's stopped snowing now."

"I went today after work in the blinding snow," Margaret said.

"And Louise," Ned said, looking across at his youngest sister but quickly glancing aside. The sight of her, the way she had changed, still shocked him as it had when he'd first seen her late this afternoon.

Louise smiled wistfully and waited for Ned to go on.

"You'll have to build your strength up and come and see me and Mildred this spring. You'd love Madison. It's a lively little burg. It's really up-and-coming."

"I'd like to see Madison," Louise said.

"Only you mustn't break the hearts of all the college students at the University."

"Sure and what would she be wanting with the students?" Mary O'Flaherty asked.

"Same old Mud, aren't you, Mother?" Ned asked, turning and looking at his mother.

She looked young.

"And what would make you think I'd be changing?" she asked.

"Come on, let's see you smile, Mud, instead of frowning the way you are. Let's see you be jolly."

"And what's there to be jolly about?" she asked.

"I know," Danny said.

"What, Danny?" Ned asked.

"Christmas is coming," Danny said.

II

Ned hadn't wanted to come but he knew that he should come and he was glad he had. On the road and back at home with Mildred in Madison he'd thought often of his family. It made him sad. Only he couldn't let himself be unhappy. That was the difference between himself and the rest of them. They let themselves be unhappy. He didn't. That's why he'd married Mildred. Of course, Mildred wasn't too strong, but he and Mildred were happy. There was no gloom in their house. But cripes, it was awful. He hadn't fully believed what Al had been writing him and telling him about Louise, but she looked sick and run down all right and the damned doctors hadn't done her one bit of good.

He was riding on an Indiana Avenue streetcar on his way to see his father in the hospital. He wore a black derby, a black muffler, a dark overcoat of good quality, pearl-gray gloves, and spats. He was pleased with the way he looked. As he boarded the streetcar he wished he'd meet someone he

used to know and they would see how prosperous and well set-up he looked.

His face became grave. These were no thoughts to have on a journey like this to see his sick old father in the hospital.

He looked out of the window. There was snow on the street and sidewalks. There was snow packed in lines on the window-sills of the buildings along the street. He noticed the lighted windows, the lights behind curtains and drawn shades. At home he always drew the shades at night, and he'd be alone with Mildred. She sometimes was too tired to see people because she wasn't well. He wished he were back in Madison now, spending the evening alone with Mildred. He was glad to see his family. He would do what he could to cheer his father up. But he didn't like to see sadness and sickness. So much of it, so much of sadness and sickness was in the mind. That was what he'd learned when he'd grown up and become a man. He'd learned that you had to keep sadness and sickness out of your mind.

The lighted windows of the buildings on Indiana Avenue still held his eye. He thought that behind those lights there was happiness. It was like the happiness inside you. Outside was the dark night and the cold and the wind and the snow. Inside was the warmth and the light.

How could he convince his family to believe in the happiness within? Except for Liz here, they were all getting on so well. His new job was the best he'd ever had, and he was going to make a lot of money. In two-three years he'd be doing as well as Al. And that was a nice apartment his family lived in on Indiana, with steam heat and electricity and a bathroom. They had a telephone. Peg had a good job. And then, this sickness coming. His father. Louise. He hadn't really realized how bad it was.

III

His son Ned was coming to see him all the way from Madison, Wisconsin. Just to see him. Sure and he wouldn't let on.

to Ned how sick a man he was. And by God, now, he wasn't so sick a man. He was shaved and had been given a haircut, and he'd be looking his best.

Couldn't he remember Ned as a little fellow running about, and his sisters teasing him, and hadn't he always told the girls:

—Don't plague and tease your brother.

As a boy, Ned was always laughing and joking. Al now, Al was a fine son, and a fine success he was. He was a son he could be proud of. But Al was a bossy one. Al took after his mother. Ned took after him. Even as a boy Al was a kind of a bossy one and you could leave all of them with Al, and Mary would say:

—Al, me son, you make the children toe the mark.

And toe the mark they did. Sure, Al was the fine success, he was. But it wasn't his doing. Many a time, these years, hadn't he told himself that it wasn't much that he ever gave to his children except the bread in their mouths and the roof over their heads until they could provide for themselves, and once they could provide for themselves there was nothing for him to do for them. If he lived or died, it meant nothing to them. Would it mean anything to his son-in-law? Sometimes he would be thinking that Jim O'Neill understood him better than any of his own did. Jim was poor like he was, but could there be a better man? Sure and he hoped that Jim would be coming to pay him a visit again this Sunday. But Jim had his own cares. Maybe Jim had no time for him. Sure, did he mean much of anything to any soul on this earth?

They came to see him, and there were flowers there by his bed. They sent him flowers. But what was he to them? A burden. What was he in his old age? A burden. A burden to the world.

When he had his health and his strength he could always have a can of beer if feelings like this came on him. Now all he could have was these needles and those pills, whatever they were, that they gave him to put him to sleep.

Sure, he was never without his pains. Sometimes they weren't bad and again they would be worse. They were with him now, only they weren't worse, they weren't tearing away at him. It was them that had taken away his strength and kept him here, lying on the flat of his back the whole livelong day with nothing to occupy him but his thoughts and memories. Ah, it was health that was the finest gift of God to man, and health he hadn't.

Sure and when he was a young buck, it wasn't this that he ever thought he'd come to. He was like a sick old horse with his work all done, and he'd worked all of his life like a horse and now here he was, a sick old horse. It was tired he was, and at times he didn't know if he cared or not what became of him.

It was time for his son Ned to be coming to see him.

He sighed. Then he trembled. The pains were hurting him more. He felt chilly. His legs felt cold and chilly and his hands were chilly, but it was mostly in the legs. He became frightened. He wanted to cry with fear.

The pains came hard, burning, throbbing, cutting. He groaned and wretched.

IV

"You're looking good, Dad," Ned said.

He was speaking cheerfully and smiling.

"You think so?" Old Tom asked with real interest.

His son Ned's coming did his heart good, and it was as if Ned's coming had taken away the pains.

"Yes, I do, Dad."

He couldn't let his father know what he had thought and what a shock it had been to see him like this. God, cripes, the sight of his father just tore at him. How old he looked! How thin! How wasted, wasted away! He would put what cheer he could in his old father.

"It does me good to see you, Ned, and how are you?"

"I'm well, Dad, well. I never felt better."

"That's fine, me lad, fine. Where is it again, that you live now? Sure, I can't remember one city from another. Is it Green Bay, Wisconsin?"

"No, Dad, Madison, Wisconsin. When you get better and are on your feet, I want you to come and see us. Sometimes we rent a horse and buggy and take a drive around the lakes, and we'll rent a horse and buggy and you'll drive us. Would you like that?"

"Yes," Old Tom said without interest.

"That's why you want to get well quick. Next spring you can come to see us and we'll have our drive. It'll be like old times, Dad, when you'd sometimes take me with you on the wagon."

"That I'd do, wouldn't I?" Old Tom said, a wan light of memory coming into his eyes.

And couldn't he remember Ned as a little boy, laughing, walking along Twelfth Street and himself proud as a peacock?

He gazed at Ned curiously and with disbelief. This man, Ned, in his fine-looking clothes, was the same Ned, the same as the little boy who had laughed with him, sitting up on the seat of the wagon. And himself, he was the same man. And there was Ned, the same Ned, sitting in that chair, and here was he in this hospital bed. Oh, he wished he was young again and in his good health, and the children were small and Mary was young. Ah, and wasn't it a mystery, life.

"We had good times together, Dad."

"That we did," Old Tom said softly.

God Almighty, this was awful. Never in his life had Ned seen anything like this!

—My father is really dying.

The thought forced itself upon him, and for a moment his smile and geniality vanished, and there were fear and sorrow on his face. He was speechless. He couldn't give in to these feelings. He couldn't allow himself to believe that his father was dying. He couldn't let his faith in goodness be destroyed this way.

He sat for some seconds, shaken.

—My father is dying. The thought again forced itself on him.

The little hospital room now was a place of fear. He wished he could leave.

"We'll have good times again, Dad," Ned said hollowly.

"Sure, Ned, I'll never be a well enough man, Ned, to be going to see you in—where is it you say you live?"

"Madison, Dad."

"Madison, Wisconsin. I'm no one to be remembering names of American cities."

Ned looked at the dark night outside. He wished it were morning so that he could see the sun shining.

"I'll never get out of this bed, me boy."

"Don't talk like that, Dad. You're going to be well and on your feet. There's goodness in the world, and you just believe in it. You tell yourself that you're going to get well, Dad. Faith can move mountains. And tomorrow morning when the sun is shining, you'll feel like a different person, a different man."

Ned believed what he was saying. His own words had an intoxicating effect on him, and the sense of fear as a presence, as a lurking danger, was gone.

"No, I know, me lad. Me time is up."

"Don't lose your faith, Dad."

"Me time is up. The pains that I do have down in me very vitals, it's like snakes were inside of me, Ned, eating me. And me strength is gone. There's no strength left in me, and here I am . . ."

Old Tam stopped.

"Let's see a smile on your face, Dad. Don't give up. Don't lose your faith."

"You say it's Madison, Wisconsin, where you live? And your wife . . . ?"

A quizzical expression came on the old man's face.

"Mildred—she's doing well, Dad," Ned said.

She wasn't. She was so often sick. Sickness. Why did there have to be sickness?

"You should see Madison. It's a very pretty little town, Dad."

"Is it?" Old Tom asked, but in a tired and disinterested voice.

He was tired again, tired, weary, and in pain.

A bell rang.

"It's time now for visitors to leave, Mr. O'Flaherty," a nun said, entering the room.

"Good-by, Pa," Ned said, trying to keep his voice under control.

V

There were all kinds of questions he could have asked his father, and he could have said much more to him than he had. But he had jollied up the old man a little.

He was still depressed from his visit to the hospital. The smells of medicine, the sight of his father, all that the hospital meant, pain and suffering, sickness and death. And it wasn't bad enough that there was so much suffering, so much of the dark side in life, but some people had to talk about it. Take his sister, Lizz. She always talked about it.

Ned sat with his mother in the dining room. She was darning a pair of Danny's black stockings. He remembered how as a boy he had sometimes seen her sewing and darning for his father and for the rest of them. He wished he were a boy again; there hadn't been much sickness in the family then. Since he had been born there hadn't been a death in the family except for Lizz's children, born dead or dying at birth, and that was different. God had been good to them all of these years, sparing them, giving and granting them success and good health. But if his father died. . . . He still wouldn't believe his father could die. Two weeks ago when he'd met Al when both of them were on the road, he'd lost his head with Al.

—Ned, I think the old fellow is dying.

He remembered telling Al that he was of little faith. Well, Al was of little faith. All of them in the family were of little faith compared to him. None of them believed in the Good the way he did. And if anything could save his father it was believing in the Good. Maybe because of his belief in the Good, his father would still be spared.

He was young yet. But one day he would be old and he would suffer, too. He didn't want to think of it. His God, when we were sick and dying, we were like animals. The thought revolted him.

He looked up and across the room at his mother. She looked very calm, at peace with herself. Her head was bent forward, and she gazed over the glasses which were pushed down almost to the tip of her nose.

Like animals.

We die like animals.

We are born like animals.

He was ashamed. He felt sorry for himself and for his mother. His heart began to pound. He remembered how ashamed he had felt when he had first learned how babies were born, how he had been born. To think of himself coming out of his mother, that little woman sitting in the room with him. To think of the blood in it. To think of his father, the sick old man he'd seen tonight in the hospital, and his mother.

"Oh, rats," he exploded, jumping nervously to his feet.

"What's the matter, Ned? . . . Is something eatin' you?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, looking up and gazing at her son over her glasses.

"Nothing, Mud. . . . I think I'll turn in now."

"Well, have a good night's sleep, Ned."

Looking over her glasses, Mary O'Flaherty went on darning a black stocking of her grandson.

Chapter Thirty-two

I

OLD Tom waited to scream and moan and beg. Death was going to come and leap upon him like a thief in the night. He didn't hear a sound except something outside, and it was like he was hearing howling in the night. The cold. The cold in his toes. The cold in his knees. The chill in his hands. The cold, the chill. And would his soul burn and suffer the way his poor old body was suffering?

The room was dark. He was quiet for a moment. He heard something. A little noise. A rustling. He heard the rustling of the fat nun's robes. He heard a little rustling noise. It was death sneaking like a thief in the night.

If he could leap out of the bed and be off. Off to God. A poor sinning man like himself off to face God. To be judged. Oh, his sins. God have mercy on his soul.

"Ohhhh!"

He groaned in pain, and as he did he saw dimly in his mind the throne of God, and God, old and dim and with a long beard, gazing at him sternly. God was sending him to Hell.

"Oh, oh—ah ah."

The chill. The chill of death. The chill of death on him. On his limbs.

Lowly, feebly, he moaned. His moans were cries of fear, and for pity.

He closed his eyes. Now it was his time. Now he would die. Another moan.

He wanted to speak. He wanted to tell, to tell someone he was afraid to go. He wanted Mary or one of his children or Father Hunt to tell him that he wasn't going.

He moved his lips to say something. He mumbled incoherently in the darkness.

II

"Why is it raining so much, Mother?"

"Sure, son, I wish it wasn't. It's been raining these last four days, but the sun should be coming out and you can be going out to play."

"I wish it was Christmas."

"Never fear, Christmas will soon be here."

"I wish tomorrow was Christmas."

Mary O'Flaherty looked down at her grandson, her eyes filled with love. Ah, the little fellow was so innocent. Tom, her Tom, was in the hospital, dying, and no one could know the heaviness in her heart. She wanted harm never to come to this innocent little boy, her grandson. She would protect him from harm as long as there was strength and breath in her old body.

"Mother?"

"Yes, son?"

Her voice was very tender.

"How's Father?"

"Ah, he's doing well. He's a sick man, your grandfather is."

"Will he come home for Christmas?"

She shook her head sadly. The little boy was so innocent. Sure, she loved him more than she had ever loved any of her own, even her son Al.

"No, he won't be coming home for Christmas, son."

They'd only be bringing poor Tom in a casket for him to be buried. There was heaviness in her poor heart.

"Couldn't he just come home for Christmas and then go back to the hospital?"

"No, son, the doctor wouldn't like it."

"Won't he be lonesome in the hospital on Christmas? I wouldn't want to be alone in the hospital on Christmas."

Ah, the little fellow's innocence would cut a person's heart.

And poor Tom, wasn't the poor man lonesome in the hospital? Poor Tom, all by himself, and what must be on his mind? Didn't he know he was passing away?

"How is he, Mother?"

"What's that you're sayin', son?"

"How is Father?"

"Oh, he's not too good."

"Is he any better than he was here?"

"No, son, he isn't."

Danny looked at her gravely. He wanted to ask Mother when Father was going to die. He couldn't ask the question. They didn't want him to know that Father was dying, and if he asked her this question, then they'd know that he knew that Father was dying.

"You go and play, son," she said.

He stood for a moment, still looking at her gravely. Then he ran off.

She remained standing in the kitchen.

She said to herself,

—I ask the help of God in this, my bitter hour.

III

He felt very cold. The cold was in him. The cold was in his feet and legs and in his arms. It was in him.

His eyes were fixed, rigid. He saw the ceiling. It was right over him, close to him. He heard her calling him:

• "Pa."

—Mary. He pronounced her name and he couldn't speak. He tried to speak.

—Mary.

"Sure, poor Pa doesn't even hear me."

—I hear, Mary.

"Oh, he can't hear, Mother, he's dying. Oh, this agony," said Margaret.

"Ssh. Ssh. They can hear. The last thing they lose is hearing."

—I'm hearing. I'm hearing you talk of me dying.

The cold. Dying ^{was} cold. The cold on him was death, death coming on him.

A tear formed in his eyes. The breath came out of him like noise and a wind. The breath came out of his throat like the big wind.

He was only feeling the cold in him and hearing.

"Sure, poor Pa."

He turned his head. He saw his wife and daughter with blurred eyes. They were blurred objects. He knew them from their voices. He was leaving them. He was leaving this sorry vale of tears. He was leaving. He wanted to see his poor old mother. Leaving. Was his mother in Heaven praying to God for his poor soul?

His lips moved.

"Sure, he's trying to talk, Peg."

"What is it, Father? Father, do you know me?" Margaret asked, leaning forward and bending close to him. "I love you, Father."

His lips moved.

—Good .

His breath came in gasps.

—Good . . .

The chill. The chill in him. The chill of ice in him.

—Good . . .

"Sure, it's the death rattle, Peg," Mary O'Flaherty said with fright.

—Good-by, Mary.

"Tom!" Mary O'Flaherty cried out.

His mother in Heaven. His mother. His mother in Heaven. pray for him. Save him. Save him from the fires of Hell.

IV

The telephone rang.

"Hello," Margaret answered.

Danny was playing with his blocks, building a house.

"What?" Margaret asked with such tenseness in her voice that Danny stopped playing and looked up.

"When?"

He watched. Her voice made him afraid. He knew why. The hospital was calling about Father.

"Peg? Peg? Is that the hospital?" Mary O'Flaherty asked, rushing into the dining room from the kitchen.

"Yes . . . yes We will . . ."

Margaret hung up. She was pale.

"Father died."

"God have mercy on poor Pa's soul."

Margaret sobbed.

Danny sat looking at them. He was afraid.

Aunt Louise came into the room.

"Your father is dead," Mary O'Flaherty said.

Margaret's sobs became convulsive.

Mary O'Flaherty left the room and went through the kitchen into her own room, entered it, and closed the door.

Louise sat down, put her head on the table, and quietly cried. She coughed. She picked up her handkerchief from the table. She coughed into it. There was a red stain on the white handkerchief.

Margaret went on sobbing.

Danny sat, fixed in fright.

A holy candle burned on her dresser in the dark bedroom.

Mary O'Flaherty rocked back and forth. Tears rolled down her face. Her hands were on her big, black rosary beads. Her lips moved in prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

SECTION FIVE

Chapter Thirty-Three

I

THE parlor seemed small with Old Tom's casket by the window. It was sick with the sweet odor of flowers. The green shades were drawn, walling out the sun.

Danny stood in the center of the parlor, staring at the corpse.

They were all out in the dining room, eating. Mrs. Morton was with them. She had cried when she saw Father like this. They talked like they were whispering. They weren't fighting now. Uncle Ned and Aunt Margaret had had an awful fight. He didn't know what they fought about. Now they had made up.

There was Father. He couldn't talk. He was Father all right, and he wasn't Father. He had on a dark new suit. His hands were folded over his stomach. Rosary beads were in his hands.

Father didn't move.

Danny took a step nearer the casket.

He wanted Father to move.

That noise was a streetcar going by outside. Aunt Peg was saying something in the back.

He wanted Father to move. Father couldn't move. Father couldn't talk.

He took another step.

He wanted to make Father move. Danny went timidly and slowly up to the casket. He looked at the corpse.

Father was a different color. His eyes were closed. Father was a gray-brown color. His hair was white. He wanted to touch Father. He wanted to know how Father felt. Maybe it

was bad to touch Father. So'n thing might happen to him. They wouldn't want him to touch Father.

He leaned forward and touched the stiff, clammy finger. The touch was different from touching his own hand. Father's hands were cold, not too cold, just a little cold. He touched the soft, dead flesh of the eyelids. And Father didn't move. It was funny touching Father. But nothing happened.

Danny went away from the coffin. He heard Aunt Peg crying. He looked at Father.

And Father didn't move. Danny stood in the center of the parlor looking with transfixed eyes at the corpse of Old Tom, and he heard whispering voices in the dining room, the low agonized sobs of his Aunt Margaret, and then the noise of a streetcar going by on Indiana Avenue.